JACK
THE YOUNG TRAPPER

GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL

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TRAILS OF THE PATHFINDERS

"We've Got a Beaver, I Reckon."—*Page* 171.

JACK
THE YOUNG TRAPPER

An Eastern Boy's Fur Hunting in the Rocky Mountains

BY

GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL

Author of "Jack the Young Ranchman," "Jack Among the Indians," "Jack in the Rockies," "Jack the Young Canoeman," "Pawnee Hero Stories," "Blackfoot Lodge Tales," "The Story of the Indian," "The Indian of To-day," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER KING STONE

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FOREWORD

A CENTURY ago the western half of the American Continent was unknown. Vast herds of buffalo and antelope swarmed over its rolling plains; elk and deer fed along its rivers; wild sheep and white goats clambered over its rocky heights; bears prowled through its forests; beavers built their dams and houses along every stream. Occasionally a group of Indians passed over the plains or threaded the defiles of the mountain ranges.

A few years later the white man began to penetrate this wilderness. Beaver were growing scarcer, and men were forced to go further for them. So the trapper entered these unknown fastnesses and began his work. He followed up stream after stream, sought out remote valleys, crossed deserts. With rifle in one hand and trap in the other, he endured every hardship and exposed himself to every danger. He swam rivers, climbed mountains, fought Indians, and risked life in his struggle for fur.

They were men of firm courage and stern resolution, those trappers of the early days. About their life and their work there is a romance and a charm that appeal powerfully to the imagination. Jack Danvers was fortunate in that the man who taught him some of the secrets of that now forgotten life was one who had borne a part in the work of subduing the wild west, and in laying the foundations upon which its present civilization is built.

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I

A COUNCIL OF WAR

"WELL, Jack," said Mr. Sturgis, "I am glad to see you back again."

"Indeed, Uncle George, you can bet I am glad to get back," replied Jack. "I tell you it just made my heart rise up to ride over the prairie to-day; it seemed to me that I never smelt anything so good as the odor of the sage, and the little birds that kept getting up out of the road and flying ahead of the team and alighting again, seemed like old friends. Then we saw some antelope and a coyote or two. I tell you it was bully. It seemed mighty good, too, to see Hugh after all these months."

"Well," said Mr. Sturgis, "it is good to get you back, and I hope you will have a good summer. Have you thought of what you want to do?"

Jack shook his head. "No," he said, "I have not; it is good enough to be back. As soon as this storm is over I want to go out and take a ride and see the country again."

"Oh, this snow won't last long, though it's a pretty rough night now. Where were you on the road when it began to snow?" asked Mr. Sturgis.

"We were just about half through the Little Basin," said his nephew. "Hugh had been looking at the sky for quite a little while back, and said that it was going to snow. We drove pretty fast from the Troublesome until we got into the Big Basin; the snow didn't get very deep until about three or four miles back from here. From there on we had pretty slow driving."

"Well," said Mr. Sturgis, "suppose you go out and see if you can find Hugh, and ask him if he will come in here and sit with us for a little while; I want to talk with you both."

"All right," replied Jack, and he disappeared in the direction of the ranch kitchen.

It was about the middle of the month of May, and Jack Danvers, after a winter of hard work at school in the East, had come out by the Union Pacific Railroad to spend the summer at his uncle's ranch. His old friend, Hugh Johnson, had met him at the railroad station with a team of horses hitched to a spring-wagon, and the greater part of the drive of forty miles out to the ranch had been made in record time. Then it had begun to snow and blow furiously, and the last few miles of the distance had been passed over much more slowly. In these high altitudes in the Rocky Mountains, snowstorms are common in May and June; yet, though the snow may fall deep at such times, it lies on the ground for but a short time.

Jack and his uncle had been talking after supper in the comfortable sitting room of the ranch; a fire of dry aspen logs burned merrily in the large, open fireplace, and their cheerful crackling contrasted pleasantly with the howling of the wind without.

As Mr. Sturgis sat filling his pipe in front of the fire, he looked back over the years which had elapsed since he first began to take an active, vivid interest in this nephew of his. He remembered him as a small, pale, shrunken slip of a boy, who spent all his time curled up in a chair, devouring books; a boy seemingly without vitality and without any special interest in life. He remembered how the boy woke up and became alert when he had first spoken to him of the possibility of a trip to the West. How the little fellow had wondered at and enjoyed all the different incidents

of life on a cow ranch; and how Hugh Johnson had taken to him, and instructed him in the lore of the prairies and mountains, in which Hugh was so well versed; and how year after year the boy had grown and strengthened, until now he was a young fellow of great promise. Within a few years the boy had changed from a child to something very like a man. While he was going over these years in his mind, Mr. Sturgis heard steps in the passage without, and then Jack's voice, and a moment later the door opened and Hugh Johnson and Jack stepped into the room.

"Sit down, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis, "and fill your pipe; I want to talk with you. You sit down, too, Jack. We have matters to discuss which will be interesting to both of you, I think. It was pretty hard hauling this afternoon, wasn't it?" he continued, addressing Hugh.

"Well, yes, Mr. Sturgis, it was so"; said the old man. "The snow finally got so deep that I would not force the horses. They are strong, and are willing, and they might have trotted, but we wasn't trying to catch a train, and they balled up pretty well in this wet snow, and I was afraid that they might slip and strain something. I reckon I told you that I had shod both of them, didn't I, when you said that you wanted me to go in for Jack?"

"No," said Mr. Sturgis, "I don't remember that you did, but it was a good thing to shoe them; the roads between here and town are cruel on horses' feet, and, while one trip won't wear down a team's feet, still, they have work to do all summer, and there is so much gravel in this soil that their feet would be bound to get tender before summer is over."

"Well," replied Hugh, "that's just the way I think. A pair of shoes in front will last them pretty nearly all summer, and when they are shod we know they won't get tender."

While he had been talking, Hugh had whittled himself some tobacco, ground it fine between the palms of his hands, filled his pipe and lit it, and now he sat comfortably by the blaze, with his head encircled by a smoke wreath.

"Well, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis, "I asked you to come in here so that we could talk about what you and Jack are going to do this summer."

"Well," said Hugh, "that's for you to say, I reckon. I'm working for you—at least I'm supposed to be working for you, but it seems to me that for the last three or four years I haven't been doing much work, because I've been off playing with Jack every summer. Lord, son," he continued with a smile, "what great travelers you and me are getting to be! First we went up to the Blackfeet and played with them a season; that's when you counted your first coup; and then we went up with them another year, and came down south through the mountains and saw all them hot springs in that country, that they used to call Coulter's Hell, in old times; and then last year we went out to the big water in the west and paddled around in the salt water and got fish. You and me surely have got to be great travelers."

"Well, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis, "I guess we will have to think up something for this year. Of course, you and Jack could sit around and look after the stock, just as the rest of us do here on the ranch, but I believe it would be better for you to go off and make a trip by yourselves. What do you think?"

"Well, Mr. Sturgis," said Hugh, "it really would be pleasant to go off and make a long trip, and there's lots of good country left yet that Jack has not seen, but I don't think I get exactly what you mean. If you will speak a little plainer I will understand better."

"It is like this, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis; "Jack is out here for the summer, and I want him to have a

good time, and to see as much as he can of what there is in this country. It is all beginning to change here so fast that I am afraid the first thing we know the country will be full of people, and every time you want to ride off in some direction you will have to turn out for a wire fence, or you will get lost because there are so many roads running over the prairie. Where do you suppose you could take Jack this summer so as to give him a good time? Of course, I don't want you to take any chances, or to go where there is any danger, but, then, I know you won't do that, so I needn't speak about it."

For some moments Hugh sat silently puffing at his pipe and staring into the fireplace, while Jack, on his left hand, watched his face with absorbed interest, wondering what he would say. Presently he raised his head, and turning to Mr. Sturgis, said, "Well, Mr. Sturgis, there's a mighty nice trip to be made in the high mountains down to the southward. It's a country where there's no possible danger that I can see, though, as you know, it's only a little while ago that the Utes wiped out Major Thornburgh's command. Now everything is peaceable, and likely to remain so, I reckon."

"Where do you mean, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis, "down in the Parks of Colorado?"

"Yes, sir, that's what I mean. It's a great hunting ground down there still, and besides that, it is a fur country. I have been through there many times, and I never saw any place in the southern country where beaver were so plenty; besides that, as you know, it is up in the high mountains and the fur is good till midsummer. If you all think well of it, Jack and I could go down there and spend a couple of months trapping beaver, and if we have good luck, we might make quite a stake. We wouldn't need to carry much in the way of grub, for the country is full of game, and there are

even some bison down there, though it ain't likely that we would get to see any of them. I don't know of any prettier mountains, or where you can live better than you can down there; deer, elk, antelope, sheep, trout, and birds, till you can't rest. That seems to me about the nicest trip one could make without going off far; what do you say to it?"

"That sounds good to me, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis. "What do you think about it, Jack?"

"Why," said Jack, "it sounds awful good to me. I never thought of making a trip this year. I just thought that I was to come out here and loaf around the ranch, and hunt, and help with the stock."

"No," said Mr. Sturgis, "I think it is better for you to be off in the mountains by yourselves, and if Hugh's plan suits you, it suits me, and you can say that it can be carried out."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Jack.

"But, Hugh," Mr. Sturgis went on, "what's the shortest way to get there; and how would you go?"

"Well," said Hugh, "if we should go, I'd say the best way to do would be to take two or three pack horses and start from here with them. Of course, you can drive a wagon all the way down there, through North and Middle and South Park, but I wouldn't want to take a wagon if I could help it. If you wanted to go up in the mountains, why, you'd have to come back to that wagon. You can't make any cut-offs, or short side trips; you've always got to get back to your wagon again. I say, take some pack animals, and then you will be perfectly foot-loose, and can go where you want to and as far as you want to. If I should go that way, I would start from here, go down the Muddy, cross the Medicine Bow, follow up Rock Creek, and cross over to the Laramie, and follow up the Laramie until I got into North Park. From there, it's plain sailing, either through the valley

or among the mountains. Son, here, is a good packer, and with a simple outfit like that we can make good time."

"Then, when you get into the high mountains," said Mr. Sturgis, "you think you can get some beaver, do you?"

"Yes," assented Hugh, "unless things have changed there almightily within a few years. The last time I came through there, I was looking for beaver sign and it seemed to me tnat all the streams up the mountains were full of beaver, and, as I say, up there in that high country they hold their coats well, and you can trap them until July or August. Indeed, I have known of men that trapped right on through the whole summer, but I don't think it's a good thing to do."

"Is there any other fur there?" said Mr. Sturgis.

"Not much else," answered Hugh. "Of course, there are some marten, and now and then a wolverine or two, but you can't get them until the snow comes. Mink are not worth much, and otter are so few that you might as well count them out of the question, too; but there are some bears; in fact there should be a good many bears, and their coats are good until July; but if we are going to trap, beaver are what we would have to depend upon. Maybe we might catch a bear or two in a dead fall, but I wouldn't bother to take along one of those big steel traps on the chance of getting one or two hides with it. Those traps are not worth bothering with if you have a long way to go. They are all right to set around the ranch, if you think you need a bear hide, or if you have got a wagon to drive around in, but I have no use for them on a pack. I have heard lately that some of these pilgrims that come from the East and are stuck on getting bears, put out baits and set traps near them, but I never could see any fun in that sort of thing. If you want to hunt bears, why, hunt them, and prove that

you are more cunning and skillful than they are. It's no fun to set a trap, and then when a bear gets into it to crawl up and shoot it. It is some fun to get the best of the shyest and wildest animal that goes on four legs, but I don't see where the fun comes in in trapping them, and then crawling up on them and killing them. It's too much like chopping a chicken's head off—and that wouldn't be very much fun for any of us."

"I agree with you, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis; "but you know there are all sorts of people back East, just as there are all sorts of people here, and some of those men who come out to hunt, take back great stories about the bears that they have trapped, and about the danger that they were in when they killed the bear. Of course, that does not seem to us very honest, but there are braggarts all over the world."

"That's so, Mr. Sturgis," said Hugh. "I guess the frauds are not confined to any one part of the country; you find them 'most everywhere."

"So you do, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis, as he knocked out his pipe against the stones of the fireplace.

"Well," he went on, "about the trip that you and Jack are going to make. Let's think it over for a day or two, and if it still seems good to you, the sooner you start the better."

"Very well," said Hugh. "The sooner we get started the better the fur will be, and the longer it will last. We'll chew on it for a day or two, son, and see what we can make out of it." So saying, Hugh rose from his seat, knocked out his pipe, and saying good-night to Mr. Sturgis, disappeared down the passage.

Before long Jack and his uncle went to bed—Jack to dream of the glories of the trip, and the beaver he was to trap.

II

A PLEASANT SPRING RIDE

When Jack arose the next morning and looked out of the window on the little valley below the house, and upon the side of the mountain, he saw the ground covered with snow, which glistened in the brilliant sunshine. It did not take him long to get into his clothes, and he rushed through the house and out the kitchen door and down toward the corral. Over the hills beyond the barn a number of horses were galloping, with streaming manes and tails, and behind them was Joe, zig-zagging back and forth, occasionally snapping forward the end of his trailing rope to hurry up the laggards. It was a good sight—one that Jack had not seen for a couple of years—and he ran on down toward the corral, but suddenly a thought struck him, and he stopped, turned, and started back to the house.

When he burst into the kitchen again, he said, "Oh, Mrs. Carter, please give me a couple of lumps of sugar for Pawnee; I want to see if the old horse will know me, and whether he does or not, I want to be friends with him." He ran back into the sitting room and got the old whistle which he had taught his horse to obey, and put it in his pocket. Seizing the sugar which Mrs. Carter had put on the table, he hurried down to the corral. When he got there, the horses for the day's riding were being caught up, and he entered. He had long ago lost the old fear that he had had as a little fellow, that the frightened horses would run over and trample him. Stepping out into the middle of the corral, he looked at the bunch of twenty or thirty

horses which stood there sleepily, as long as they were undisturbed, but were quick enough to move about and try to dodge the rope when it was thrown at them. By this time the men had caught all their horses, and Joe walked over to the gate, ready to open it as soon as Jack had caught his. Jack called to him, "Say! wait a minute, Joe; I want to try an experiment;" and he put the whistle to his lips and blew the old call that he had been accustomed to use for Pawnee. The horse was standing partly hidden by two or three others, but the moment the whistle blew he raised his head, and turned and looked at Jack. Jack stood perfectly still for a moment or two, and then blew the whistle once more, and the horse stepped forward over toward Jack, with his head up, his ears thrust forward, and an expression of great interest on his countenance. Again Jack blew the whistle, and this time he reached out his hand toward the horse, which again took three or four steps and stopped only a few feet from Jack, reaching out his nose to Jack's hand, as if trying to smell it. Jack put his hand into his pocket and laid a lump of sugar in his palm, and whistled once more, and the horse stepped forward and took the sugar, and as he crunched it in his teeth, stepped forward again, so that his head was close to Jack's shoulder.

Jack patted him very gently, and then slipped the rope over his neck and knotted it and began to rub the horse's head and ears. Gradually—as it seemed to Jack—the horse's memory awakened, and after a few moments Jack felt quite confident that Pawnee recognized him and was glad to see him. The horse rubbed his head vigorously against Jack's shoulder, and seemed to enjoy being petted.

As their old friendship seemed to be resumed, Jack called to Joe to open the gate, and after he had done so the horses walked out. Some of them had already

shed their winter coats, but on others the long hair hung down three or four inches below their necks and bellies. The dust and dirt of the corral was full of shed hair, and great wads of it were lying about everywhere.

Just as Jack started out with Pawnee, to take him to the barn, Hugh passed by and said, "Does he know you, son?"

"I really think he does, Hugh," said Jack. "At first he didn't, though he remembered the whistle, and recognized the sugar when I held it out to him, but now I believe he knows who I am. It's pretty hard on him to have to remember me, for I expect I have changed more or less in appearance every year, and you know it's two years now since I have seen the old horse."

"Yes," said Hugh; "I don't wonder that he was a little slow to know you, but after all, a horse has a long memory, and inside of twenty-four hours it will all come back to him. I reckon that to-morrow he will likely come right up to you in the corral or on the prairie."

"He's fat and in fine condition, isn't he, Hugh? He looks to me to be in the bulliest kind of order for a trip."

"Lord, yes," said Hugh, "he's fat enough, for I don't think he has done anything for two years. Your uncle would not let him be ridden last year, he was so much afraid that something might happen to him. I shouldn't be a little bit surprised if he would kick and crowhop quite a little when you first get on him. I don't believe he would really pitch, but he's likely to pretend to. He looks fatter than he really is, though of course he's fat enough," the old man went on, "but that long winter coat of his makes him look as round as a ball."

"Yes," assented Jack, "it does, of course; and what

tremendous coats these horses get in this country, don't they?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "they have to; for, as you know, it is fearful cold here in winter, and, of course, the horses are out on the range all the time and they've got to do something to keep themselves warm, so they grow these long coats. Look at this now!" and walking up to Pawnee he put his hand under his brisket, and pulling a little from side to side took off a great patch of hair and held it out to Jack so that he could look at it. There were seen the roots of the long hairs sticking up through a sort of fur or down, such as may be seen next to the skin of an elk or a deer when it is shedding its winter coat.

"There," said Hugh, "do you see that fur that grows next to the skin? Most animals in this cold climate develop that during the winter, and you can see that it's almost like the fur on the otter, the beaver, or the muskrat. It must keep out the cold in great shape."

"I declare," said Jack, "I never saw that on a horse before. I did see it once on an elk that we killed in the spring; I think it was the first year I came out here, when I hunted with John Munroe. I have seen this same kind of fur on a St. Bernard dog, too; the animals that the monks keep up on the tops of the mountains in Switzerland, away up above timber line, and that they use in winter to look for people who get lost in the snow in the mountains. They have just that kind of double coat, with long hair on the outside and a sort of fur underneath, next to the skin."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I guess all animals that live in cold climates get that same kind of coat."

While he was speaking, the horn blew, and Jack took Pawnee to the barn and tied him up, and then he and Hugh went in to breakfast.

"Well, Jack," said Mr. Sturgis, as they sat at the table, "have you and Hugh had a consultation yet over what you are going to do?"

"Not yet, Uncle George," said Jack; "but I guess we will during the day, and we will be able to tell you to-night what our decision is."

"This snow will melt right away, and the grass has started enough for you to go off on your trip any time now," said Mr. Sturgis.

"And I suppose," said Jack, "if we are going off, the sooner we get started the better. Isn't that so, Hugh?"

"I reckon it is, son; and if we're going to try to get any fur of any kind, the sooner we start the better the fur will be. It won't be long now before the animals begin to shed. Of course, a bear hide is good till well into June, and the higher up the animal lives, the longer the coat stays good. Why, in old times, we used to trap all through the summer, but, of course, if we caught fur low down on the prairie it did not bring us the price that prime pelts brought."

"Well," said Mr. Sturgis, "make up your minds what you want to do, and report to me to-night."

"All right, sir," said Hugh, and he and Jack went down toward the barn.

"What are you going to do to-day, Hugh?" said Jack.

"Why," said Hugh, "Mrs. Carter said that they were all out of fresh meat, and I thought I'd go off and see if I could kill a buck antelope. That's about all that's fit to kill now. Of course, we might go up on the mountain and hunt around, and perhaps find a mountain sheep, but I don't go much on sheep meat at this time of the year."

"Why, how's that, Hugh? I thought sheep meat was the best meat there was, except, perhaps, buffalo meat."

"Ever eat any in spring time?" said Hugh.

"No, of course I never did. I guess you've always been with me when I've eaten sheep meat, and you and I have never killed a sheep in the spring."

"Well," said Hugh, "if you kill a sheep now you'll find its meat tastes and smells so strong of garlic that perhaps you'd not care to eat it. I've eaten a good many queer things, but I'd never eat sheep meat in the spring; that is, for choice."

"Why is that, Hugh?" said Jack.

"I'll tell you," replied Hugh. "About the first green thing that springs up in these mountains is the wild leek, and the sheep, hungering for something green, hunt this up and eat it whenever they find it. The result is, that they taste of it, strong. Didn't you ever hear of that before?"

"No, indeed," replied Jack; "that's news to me. I do believe, though, that once in a while when I have been in the country in the spring the milk of the cows has tasted of garlic or onions, and they told me it was because they had been eating the wild leek."

"That's straight enough," replied Hugh. "I have drunk cow's milk in spring, out in this country, that tasted strong of sage. Now, you know well enough, without my telling you, that the meat of the sage hen tastes strong of sage, because they feed on it all the time, and didn't Mr. Fannin tell us last year that the hogs and chickens that fed on the dead salmon could not be eaten because they were so fishy? It seems to me he did."

"It seems to me he did, too, Hugh. I believe you're right about that."

"Well," said Hugh, "I guess that's common enough. I've tasted beef and buffalo both that tasted mighty strong of garlic."

"Why, yes, Hugh, I remember now, you told me all about this last year. You told me about it at the same

time that Mr. Fannin told us about the hogs and chickens which could not be eaten on account of having fed on the dead salmon. I had forgotten all about it."

"Yes, son, I thought we had talked it over before."

"Well, Hugh, you explain a good many things to me, and I am afraid I forget some of them."

"Well, son, you can't remember everything. Let's go down and saddle our horses now."

They went down to the barn and saddled up. Hugh's was a handsome young black horse, nervous and full of spirit, but with a good disposition, and Jack could not help admiring the quiet way in which Hugh walked up to and soothed the horse, talking to him and patting him in a friendly way that seemed to overcome the animal's fears.

Pawnee flinched when the saddle blanket was put on, and again when the saddle struck his back, but Jack talked to him and petted him and he stood quietly while the saddle was being cinched.

"It will be a good idea for you not to draw that cinch too tight at first, son," said Hugh, "and then to lead him around a little; if he wants to buck, let him buck with the saddle."

This seemed good advice to Jack, and he led the horse out of the barn. Pawnee acted a little wild, and kept jumping when a stirrup knocked against his side, but he made no attempt to get rid of the saddle, though nervous about the noise that it made.

"He's all right, Hugh," said Jack, "I'll leave him standing here while I run up and get my rifle and cartridge belt."

He threw down the reins and the rope, and the horse stood quietly enough by Hugh until Jack returned. Then taking the rope off his neck, he tied it to the saddle, thrust his gun in the scabbard, and throwing the reins back over the horse's head, slowly and carefully mounted. Pawnee stood very quietly,

but turned his head around as if curious to see what this weight was that he now felt on his back, and then at a touch of the spur moved off, and Hugh and Jack soon passed over the hill and out of sight of the ranch.

As the day advanced the sun grew warmer and the field of snow was dazzling.

"We ought to have blackened our faces before we started out," said Hugh. "This is just the kind of day to get a bad attack of snow blindness."

"Yes," said Jack, "I can see that's so, but this snow isn't going to last the day out. See how many patches of bare ground are beginning to show, and how the water is running off into the ravines."

"That's so," said Hugh. "If it were not for the way it's going it would be a good idea for us to tie our handkerchiefs across our noses. Anyhow, I don't want to get an attack of snow blindness; it's mighty painful, I can tell you, and every time you get it it makes your eyes weaker and more liable to another attack if you are out in the bright sunshine when the ground is covered with snow."

"Were you ever snow blind?" asked Jack.

"Yes," replied Hugh, "I've been snow blind, but I never had a real bad attack. I've been so that I couldn't see, and the way my eyes hurt was something awful, but it always passed off in a few days. I never had an attack like I've seen some men have, where they would be blind and suffering for weeks at a time."

"Where are you going to look for that antelope, Hugh?" said Jack.

"Why, I think we might go up toward the head of the Basin and then swing over onto the east side. It's warm over there, and a good many antelope coming back in spring get over there and stop for a while before they scatter out through the Basin. We're likely to see plenty of them this morning, and if we do, it does seem to me that we might as well kill a

couple. If you and me are going on a trip pretty soon there won't be anybody here to kill meat for the ranch."

"All right," said Jack, "I'd like first rate to kill an antelope again. It seems to me a long time since I've shot at one, and I'd like to find out whether I've forgotten how to shoot."

"Well," said Hugh, "you're not likely to have forgotten how to shoot, but your gun may be a little strange to you after such a long rest."

The two rode quietly along for some miles without seeing anything more than a few birds that rose from the brushy ravines which they passed, or an occasional coyote trotting over the whitened prairie on his way to some place to take his nap for the day. Down on the lake below could be seen many water fowl, and over it a great flock of these would rise and fly about in the air for a long time, and then alight again on the water. Sometimes the groups of birds formed a black spot in the sky, and then swinging out into long lines looked almost like the smoke of a locomotive carried off over the prairie. It was pleasant riding. Every moment it seemed to grow warmer and warmer, and the snow disappeared from the hills with startling rapidity.

III

AN EXPEDITION FOR FUR

HUGH and Jack had ridden some miles across the Basin without seeing any game except a few distant antelope, for which they did not turn aside. The hills, as they grew more and more bare of snow, were already beginning to turn green with the new grass which showed among the sere and yellow tufts of last year's growth. The buds were swelling on the trees and bushes which grew in the ravines they crossed, but as yet no leaves had begun to appear. Yet, all over the prairie, on and under the bushes, were seen numbers of small birds, some of them migrants on their way to the north, others summer residents that were building or were about to build their nests. Now and then was heard the distant hooting of the sage grouse.

After crossing the valley and climbing the hill on the other side of the Basin, they came out on a rolling table-land, from which the snow had almost disappeared, though here and there long lines of white were seen marking some ravine shaded from the direct rays of the sun. Over the plain before them were scattered many antelope, and Hugh said, "Now, son, watch out sharp, and let's get our meat as soon as we can, and get back."

As they rode along, they approached the top of each hill carefully, Jack keeping a little behind Hugh, who rode up very slowly to the crest, and before showing anything more than the top of his head, scanned the country beyond. They had passed over one or two such rises, when Hugh slowly bent his head,

turned his horse, and rode back toward Jack, saying, as he reached him, "There's a bunch of antelope just over the hill, and they may be just what we want; I saw the backs of two that were feeding; we better creep up there and see what they are, and remember, a dry doe, or even a yearling doe is likely to be better than a buck, and if you get a chance, kill one; I'll do the same."

Dropping their horses' reins and loading their rifles, they returned to the hilltop. Hugh went slowly and carefully, bending lower and lower as he approached the crest, and finally dropped on his knees, and crept forward. At last he stopped and very slowly raised his bared head, for he had left his hat behind him, to take another look; then, with the same slow motion, he lowered his head, and turning, motioned Jack to come beside him. As Jack reached him, Hugh whispered, "There's a big buck off to the right that you can kill, and there's another buck right in front of me that I'll take after you've shot. Get ready now, and kill your animal."

Cocking his rifle, Jack slowly raised his head, and in a moment saw the black horns of an antelope that was looking off over the prairie. He waited an instant, and then, as the animal lowered his head, he rose up a little higher, drew a careful bead on the spot that Hugh, years ago, had told him to shoot at—the little dark curl of hair just behind the foreleg—and fired. The antelope rushed away, and immediately a dozen others that had been still nearer to the hunters and out of sight, followed him. They ran part way up the next slope and then stopped nearly a hundred and fifty yards off, and as they did so, Hugh's rifle came to his shoulder and he fired. The animal that he had shot fell in his tracks, and the others rushed off over the hill. The hunters rose to their feet, and went back to the horses, picking up their hats on the way. When

they were in the saddle, Jack said to Hugh, "Did you see anything of my buck?"

"No," said Hugh, "I don't feel sure whether he fell into the ravine as they crossed, or whether he went on. I heard the ball strike him, though, and I reckon we'll find him presently."

Riding over toward the animal that Hugh had shot, they crossed the ravine, and just as they were rising the hill, Hugh stopped his horse and said, "There's your buck," and pointed down the ravine where, seventy-five or eighty yards from them, the antelope was seen standing with his head down, evidently unable to go further.

Jack pulled up his horse and looked at the animal, and said, "I don't know whether I had better give him another shot, or wait for him to die."

"Well," said Hugh, "I reckon if I was you, I'd get off and shoot him again; he's hard hit, but sometimes one of those fellows will give you a chase of three or four miles if he gets frightened, even though he may have a mortal wound."

"All right," said Jack, and he dismounted, and stepping back behind the horses, he shot from the shoulder, and the antelope fell over and was hidden in the brush of the ravine.

It took but a short time to clean Hugh's buck and put it on the horse, and a few minutes later, Jack's was similarly tied on his horse. Both animals had fair heads, but Hugh had said, "It's not worth while to pack all this extra weight back to the ranch; we may as well cut it down as low as possible"; so they had removed the heads and necks and shanks, before tying the carcasses behind the saddles with the buckskin strings with which they were provided. While they were doing all this, the sky had become overcast and the wind had begun to blow up cold from the west. They mounted their horses and started back for the

ranch, stopping at the first snowbank, where, in the moist snow they washed the blood from their hands.

"Well," said Hugh, "this wind is blowing up right cold; if we had a sheltered place to sit down, I would like to smoke a pipe, but as we haven't, I reckon we better keep on across the valley until we find a lee over there where we can sit and smoke and talk." But by the time they had crossed the valley the sun had come out again, and Hugh said, "Now, son, if we keep poking right along and don't stop, we will get back to the ranch in time to get some dinner. I move that we do that, for I'm right wolfish."

"Good enough," replied Jack, "that will suit me; we'll have all the afternoon to smoke and talk."

They were yet half a mile from the ranch when they heard the dinner horn, but after they had hung up their meat, unsaddled their horses, and got into the house, they found the men were still at the table, and sat down with them.

How good that first dinner did taste to Jack after his morning's ride! There was the last of some elk meat, killed the fall before by Hugh, potatoes, canned tomatoes, and lots of good bread, and plenty of milk and cream. Joe said to Jack, as he watched him eat, after he had finished his own meal, "Eat hearty, Jack; it's a mighty good thing to enjoy your victuals like you do!"

"Well," said Jack, "I've enjoyed lots of good meals in my life, but it seems to me that this is the best I ever did eat, and this milk is splendid, too. I can drink a quart of it."

"It's something you don't get often on a cow ranch in this country," said Joe. "'Pears like the more cows a man has, the less milk he gets; but I tell you it's a mighty good thing to have, and it helps out the eatin' wonderfully."

"Well," said Mr. Sturgis, "it always seemed to me

that it is worth while to have the best food there is going, just as far as you can afford it."

"You had better drink all you can, son," said Hugh, "because if you and me are going off for a trip, to be gone two or three months, you won't see any milk for a mighty long time."

Jack grinned as he replied, "Don't be afraid, Hugh. I'm going to fill myself just as full of the good things as I possibly can, and when I get where I can't have them, why, I will enjoy the things we can have just as much as I know how."

"That's good philosophy, Jack," said his uncle; "stick to it; always get the best you possibly can, but never grumble if that best is pretty poor."

Dinner over, Hugh and Jack adjourned to the bunk house, and there, sitting in its lee in the warm sunshine, they began to discuss their plans.

"Now, Hugh," said Jack, "what do you think about our summer's trip? Tell me all you can, for I want to know what is coming. Of course whatever you say goes."

"Well, son," said Hugh, "you have traveled and hunted and seen Indians, but there's one thing you have not done; you haven't done any trapping. It seems to me that it would not be a bad idea for you to learn something about that. I used to be a pretty fair trapper in my young days, and I reckon we can go down south here in the high mountains and perhaps get some fur; not much, but enough, maybe, to pay our expenses, and then we can come back here and turn it in to Mr. Sturgis as a sort of pay for our time and for the use of the horse flesh we have had."

"That seems to me a bully idea, Hugh; it does seem a shame for me to come out here every year and take you away from the ranch for all summer, for I suppose that, of course, my uncle pays you right along?"

"Sure he does," said Hugh. "He paid me my wages that season we spent up in the Blackfoot country, and again when we came down through the mountains, and again out in British Columbia, just the same as if I had been here hunting and wrangling horses for the ranch, working thirty days in every month. Of course, he does this on your account, he don't do it on my account; he does it because he is fond of you, and wants you to have a good time, and wants you to learn things about this Western country. I'm a kind of hired school teacher for you, and I tell you, Jack, I like the job, and I reckon you do, too. The reason I speak to you about it now is because you're older, and you ought to think about things more, and not just take the good things that come to you, like a hog under an acorn tree."

"Of course, Hugh, I understand, and I'm glad that you speak to me like this about it; but what do you mean by 'a hog under an acorn tree'?"

"Why don't you know that old saying about a hog going along and eating the acorns under an oak tree and never stopping to think where they come from, or who sends them? I expect it's just because he's a hog."

"No," said Jack; "that's new to me."

"Well," said Hugh, "I reckon it's a mighty good saying. To go back," he resumed; "now we can go down into the high mountains south of here on the other side of the range and trap, and maybe get a few beaver. Of course beaver ain't worth much now, but they are worth something. If we were out on the prairie down in the lower country it wouldn't be worth while to do it, because beaver fur gets poor early in the summer, but up in the mountains, where I think of going, fur is good all the year round—better in the early spring than it is late in the summer—but it's good enough all the time."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "what particular place did you think of going to?"

"I thought of North Park," said Hugh. "There are high mountains there, plenty of game and fish, and it used to be a great country for beaver. It's a good many years since I've been in there. It must be a dozen years or more. Last time I crossed through there I had been camping on Henry's Fork of Green River, along with Ike Edwards, old John Baker, Phil Maas, and Dick Sun. That was a good bunch of men; mighty few like them in the country now. They were all old-timers, and all had skin lodges and lived there with their women in the country near Bridger, and in winter moved into houses which they had on Henry's Fork. I reckon I'll have to tell you something about them some of these days, but now we'll stick to our trip.

"North Park is high up, with mountains on both sides of it, mighty high mountains, too, and if there are any beaver living in that country, we will probably be able to find them. Beaver is about all the fur that's worth bothering with. There are not many marten, and if there were, the fur would not be good now. Of course, you may get a bear or so, and each bear would bring about seven or probably ten dollars, if we kill them before they begin to shed. Beaver is worth three or four dollars a pound. That would make a skin worth about five or six dollars—that is, a good skin. It's a good deal of a trick to skin a beaver and dry his pelt in good shape. It's one of them things, of course, that you have got to learn.

"On the other hand, beaver trapping is mighty hard work, and you had better know it beforehand. You've got to be in the water more than half the time, and have to get your beaver back to camp and skin 'em, and by the time you have been running to your traps, getting your beaver, setting your traps, packing your

catch to camp and skinning it, you will think you've done a mighty good day's work. All the same, son, you're pretty husky, and there's no reason why you should not do a full day's work, but I tell you one thing we had better do, because it will add a whole lot to our comfort—we had better get rubber boots for both, before we start out, so that we won't get any wetter than we have to get. I have had a touch of rheumatism in past years, and I don't want to get any more of it."

"That seems bully, Hugh," said Jack. "I'm willing to work harder this year than ever before, and I'm bigger and stronger and better able to do work than I ever was before. I'll try to hold up my end just as well as I can."

"Well," said Hugh, "it ain't like as if we were stone broke, and trying to make a raise to carry us through the winter. We needn't work any harder than we feel like, but when I tackle a job I like to make it a good one, and I reckon you feel that way, too."

"Yes," said Jack, "that's the way I feel about it, for that is the way the people I think most of in the world have always talked to me."

"That's good sound sense, my son," said Hugh.

"Now tell me, Hugh, how do we go from here down into North Park?"

"It's quite a ways," replied Hugh; "eight or ten days' march. We go from the ranch down the Muddy to the Medicine Bow, up that river quite a little way, and then cross over the divide to the Big Laramie and follow that up into the Park. That takes us pretty well on to Laramie City, and I guess we may as well go there anyhow, if we are going to get the rubber boots I spoke about."

"In that case we ought to start just as soon as we possibly can, oughtn't we?" said Jack. "I under-

stand that the sooner we get onto the trapping grounds the better the fur will be."

"You're dead right," said Hugh, "and I'd rather start to-morrow than the day after."

"Well," said Jack, "is there any reason why we should not start to-morrow?"

"I don't know of any," said Hugh; "but your uncle is the doctor, and he'll have to tell us what to do."

"Well," said Jack, "what's the matter with hunting him up and finding out?"

"All right," said Hugh, "let's look for him."

Mrs. Carter, when asked as to the whereabouts of Mr. Sturgis, said that the last she had seen of him he had started down toward the blacksmith's shop, and there, a little later, Hugh and Jack found him and Joe busy tinkering with some iron work needed for the horse rake. The two stood around and watched the blacksmithing for a time, and then Mr. Sturgis looked up with a twinkle in his eye, and said, "You two look like scouts that have come in to make a report; what is it?"

"You tell him, Hugh," said Jack, and so Hugh reported the conversation which had taken place and the conclusion that they had reached.

"Well," said Mr. Sturgis, "I don't know but you are right, but whether you start to-morrow or next week there is no reason why you should not get your stuff together and have it all ready to pack on the animals. If I were you, I would go and get out your pack riggings, select the horses you want to use, and get Mrs. Carter to put up your grub."

"Hurrah!" said Jack, and he threw his hat up to the roof, and then felt much mortified when it fell into the forge bucket and he dipped it out all wet; he then rushed out of the shop toward the house, while Hugh followed more slowly, going to the store room to get out the pack saddles and their riggings.

IV

MAKING READY FOR THE TRIP

A LITTLE later, when Jack came into the storeroom, he found three pack saddles and three blankets with various other pieces of the riggings strewn upon the floor. Lying by each saddle was its lash rope and cinch, its sling rope and the hackamore for the animal. A pile of saddle blankets rested in one corner of the room, from which those required for the trip would be selected. Hugh was rummaging in the storeroom, and presently came out carrying a piece of canvas and a small sack, from which he took a palm, a large sail needle with a crooked point, a piece of beeswax, and a ball of heavy thread. These he put on the floor, and then taking up the piece of canvas he cut from its side a long strip about fifteen inches wide.

"What are you going to do, Hugh?" said Jack.

"Well," said Hugh, "we're liable to have considerable climbing to do in the mountains, and while probably we won't have to make any long drives nor climb any very steep hills, yet we may want to do both. If we have anything of that sort to do, we want to keep the backs of our horses in good order. If our animals are carrying any loads these will have a tendency to slip off backward when the horse is going up hill, or to slip off forward when coming down hill. I believe we'll save ourselves and animals both, if we rig up breast bands, and breechings, too, on these saddles. Of course, one of them has a crupper already, but that does not amount to much. I believe we'd better do what I've said, and then we're pretty sure that the loads, if they are properly lashed, will stay put, and won't be giving us everlasting trouble."

"How many packs do you intend to take, Hugh?"

"Why," said Hugh, "I should think three will be a plenty; one to carry our beds, war sacks, and tent; one to carry our mess outfit and grub; and one to carry our fur, if we get any. The third horse will go light for part of the way, and then later we can use him to save the others. Of course, we could get along with two animals, but not so well, if we're going to bring anything back with us; and, of course, there's always a probability of that, though, on the other hand, we may not get anything at all."

"Well," said Jack, "three packs aren't much to bother with, and we ought to be able to travel fast with them."

"No," said Hugh, "three won't be much trouble, and we can get a good start every morning, if we want to."

While they had been talking, Hugh had set a saddle upright on the floor and had run a rope in front of it about where the animal's breast would come, and then brought the rope back to the side of the saddle; measuring the canvas by this, he cut off three strips, and then doubling them over he took the palm and sail needle and with waxed thread stitched the two edges together so that he had a double thickness of canvas, six or eight inches wide and long enough to reach from one side of the saddle to the other, around the animal's breast. Similar bands were cut and sewed for breeching, and then Hugh pointed out to Jack where one difficulty lies in using such aids to travel. "You have got to have the breast band so low that it will press on the breast and not on the throat, otherwise you stop your animal's wind—choke him. Again, if you have it too low, and if it isn't held up by anything from above, it's likely to drop down to the animal's knees. Probably the best way for us to do is to run a string through one edge of the band, bring it up, and pass it over the horse's neck and down

through the edge on the other side. There's less danger, of course, of the breeching slipping down, because it will catch on the animal's hocks. Still, I think I'll try and see if I can find a couple of cruppers for these other saddles, and then we can tie the supports for the breeching to the crupper band, midway of where it runs back from the saddle. Really, to make good breeching we ought to have it so that it can be shortened up or lengthened out, and so that it will fit any animal that the saddle is put on. I don't see how we can get along without straps and buckles, but as we haven't got any, we'll just put on a couple of snaps, two or three inches apart. I'll go ahead and sew the breeching and the breast straps on one side, anyhow, and after we get up the animals, we can fit them."

"By the way, Hugh," said Jack, "how much grub will we want to take with us? I told Mrs. Carter that we would be gone for a couple of months; was that right?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "we'll be gone a couple of months, anyhow, I should think, maybe more, but, of course, we expect to live mostly on what we kill. We'll need coffee, sugar, bacon, and flour, and baking powder, but it seems to me that it's not worth while for us to take much of that sort of thing from here. If we're going to stop in Laramie City, we can buy all that stuff there right on the railroad, and in that case, we only need to take from here a fifty-pound sack of flour, a little bacon, and a little coffee and sugar. Maybe Mrs. Carter would bake us bread enough to last us for a few days, and that would save us wrestling with frying-pan bread for a while. I reckon she would do it, if you asked her."

"All right," replied Jack, "I'll ask her, and I bet she'll do it, too. She has always been mighty nice to me."

"Yes," said Hugh, "she's a mighty nice woman."

For a little while Hugh sat silent, busy with his work of sewing up the bands of canvas and attaching them to the saddles on the off side. Presently he said, "Look here, son, it 'pears to me you're not doing much work."

"No," said Jack, "that's so, but I don't know enough to make those breast bands and breeching to help you, do I?"

"No," said Hugh, "I had better do this part of the business myself, but don't you see these riggings have got to be fitted to the animals? Now, why don't you go out and saddle up and bring in the horse bunch, and then we'll pick out the animals we need for the trip."

"All right," said Jack, "I'll go," and he started for the door.

"And while you're about it," said Hugh, "stop up at the house and tell Mrs. Carter that we shan't want much grub. It may save her lifting down a lot of heavy flour sacks, and that's no work for a woman, anyhow."

"Good!" said Jack, and he ran up to the house and explained to Mrs. Carter what Hugh had said.

A little later he was in the saddle, and spurring Pawnee over the hills north of the ranch, looked for the horse bunch. He knew about where they would be found at this time of the day, and at this season of the year, and before long he rode over a hill and saw them scattered out before him over a level hay meadow on which the grass was just beginning to be green. In a few moments he had rounded them up and started them toward the corral, but without hurrying them, for in the bunch there were a number of little colts that were rather shaky on their spindly, crooked legs, and he did not want to hurry them. In fact, as they trotted along toward the ranch, he let several of the old mares and colts drop out by the way, trying only to keep the

young horses headed for the ranch. Presently the bunch trotted over the last hill and down to the gate of the corral, and stopped. Jack rode around to one side, got off and dropped his reins, let down the bars, and then remounting rode behind the horses and drove them in. Then he hitched Pawnee to the fence, and went into the storeroom to report to Hugh.

Hugh's job seemed to be over, though one end of each band of the breeching and the breast straps was still free from the saddle.

"Well," said Jack, "you've worked pretty fast, Hugh, haven't you? I have the horses all in now, and if you'll come out and pick the ones you want, I'll catch them and tie them up, and we'll let the others go again."

Hugh rose to his feet and went up to the corral, carrying with him the three hackamores that belonged to the saddles they had selected. He looked over the bunch very thoughtfully, and then said to Jack, "Catch that bay with the bald face and the white hind feet."

Jack stepped into the corral and threw his rope, but the bald-faced bay dropped his head and crowded in among the other horses so the rope slid off. Coiling the rope again, Jack stepped forward to the bunch, and as the horses started to run around the corral he made a quick throw and caught the bay, and led it over to where Hugh stood. Then he put the hackamore on it and took it out to the gate and tied it to the fence.

"Now catch the big dun," said Hugh, and in a few minutes Jack had him, and the hackamore was put on him.

"Now," said Hugh, "take that heavy-set, iron-gray colt. He's only three, and don't know nothing, but he's gentle enough and it's time he learned. We'll let him be the third of the pack animals, and when he comes back he will be a good pack horse.

"Now let the others out," said Hugh, after Jack

had brought over the iron gray. "We'll put these horses in the hay corral to-night, and then when morning comes we'll know where they are; but first we've got to fit these saddles to them. Let's go down and bring up the blankets and the saddles and see how they go."

One after the other the pack saddles were cinched on the horses, each one having a good roll of blankets under it.

"These confounded horses are so fat now," said Hugh, "it's a hard matter to make the saddles stick on them anyway. It's a good deal like trying to cinch up a barrel; but they'll lose flesh after they've been on the road a little while, and luckily there's no load for them to carry just now. I'm putting on more blankets than I would if these horses were a little thinner. I hate to put too many blankets under a saddle. It's just as bad as not putting enough, and mighty likely to make a horse's back sore."

"Now," said Hugh, after the saddles were all in place, "let's measure these bands, and then we'll mark them with a pencil and this afternoon or to-night I'll fix them up so that they'll be in shape to put on to-morrow morning."

The work did not take long. The breast and breeching bands were brought around against each animal's breast and hips, and the place where they should be attached on the near side was marked with a pencil. After this was done, the saddles were taken off, the horses, with their hackamore shanks tied up, were turned into the hay corral, and Hugh and Jack went back to the storeroom.

While Hugh continued his work on the saddles, Jack sat cross-legged on the floor watching him and asking many questions.

"Are you going to take a tent with you, Hugh?" said Jack.

"Yes, sir," said Hugh. "I can get along all right without a tent, when I know it ain't going to rain or snow, but when I know it's going to rain I am powerful partial to some kind of shelter. Of course, if we had a small lodge, and we were sure we could get lodge poles wherever we went, I'd prefer a lodge, but as we can't have just what we want, I'm going to have a tent. Your uncle has got the nicest kind of an A tent with jointed poles, and I expect he'll be willing to let us have it. At least, I'm going to ask him for it. I don't reckon it will be in use at all this summer. You must understand that up in the mountains, and especially at this season of the year, we're likely to have lots of rain, and maybe some snow, and certainly plenty of thunder storms. Now, of course, you can get along all right when it's wet, and you can cook in the rain and eat in the rain and eat wet grub, too, if you have to, but I've always found that a man was just a little bit better off and more comfortable if he kept dry, and I've found, too, that it doesn't take much more work to keep dry than it does to keep wet. These jointed poles are the greatest things out. When they are taken apart they are about three or four feet long; there are only six pieces. They lash first class, and make a good top pack. They give you a chance, too, to put up a tent wherever you are, and into the tent you can bring all the things you want to keep dry. 'Most always you can arrange things so that you can do your cooking under some sort of cover, and even if you do get a little damp you can dry off in front of the fire, go to bed dry, and sleep dry at night. Your saddles, your ropes, and your blankets all are kept dry, and that helps you a whole lot in getting away in good shape and season in the morning. It only takes a few minutes to put up a tent, but those few minutes and the extra work will be more than paid for some night when perhaps it snows hard, and you know that if

your things were lying out in the weather it might take you half a day or all day to go around and dig them out of the snow, or in fact you might have to wait until the snow melted before you could find them again."

"Well, Hugh, it seems to me it's a pretty good idea to take a tent, especially if we're likely to strike such weather as you tell of."

"We're likely to, of course," said Hugh; "but that doesn't mean that we will. I've seen it perfectly fair up there in them mountains day after day and week after week, but then, again, I've seen it rain and snow for weeks at a time. Yes, we'd better take a tent by all means, unless it is going to be in the way."

Hugh had finished his work on the pack saddles long before supper time, and the two went up to see what grub Mrs. Carter had laid out, carrying with them two rawhide panniers, which were to hang one on either side of a pack saddle, and in them they packed the grub and carried them back to the storeroom.

The load was a light one, and Jack did not stagger under his share of it.

After supper that night, Mr. Sturgis talked with Hugh and Jack and told them that he agreed with them that they had better start as soon as they could, and be gone as long as they liked.

"You will be pretty close to the settlements all the time, I take it," he said to Hugh, "and if either of you feel like it, I should like to have a letter from you from time to time, telling me how you're getting along and what you are doing. Of course, I don't want to have you feel obliged to carry on a correspondence with me, but whenever you do get within reach of a postoffice let me hear from you that you are all right. I know you are both pretty well able to take care of yourselves, and I shan't do any worrying about you, but I have a curiosity to know what fur you find, and generally

what you see down there in those high mountains. I have never been down there myself, and if I had the time I should like to go with you. I hear that there is some great fishing in those streams. To-morrow morning I will get out my trout rod and reel and some flies, and you had better take the outfit with you. You should be able to carry it so that it won't break, and very likely there will be a good many times when you can catch some fish. You won't suffer for things to eat, because there is plenty of game in those mountains down there. You will have a good time, and maybe you will catch beaver enough to make a coat apiece. Do you expect to see any Indians, Hugh?" he asked.

"Why, yes, Mr. Sturgis, I reckon we will see some Utes, but they are all quiet now, since they killed their agent and had a fight with Thornburgh's command. I always had an idea that the truth of that business never came out, and that the Utes had a good deal more to stand than any of us know about, before they broke out the way they did. I lived down on the edge of their country once, for several years, and knew most of the Uinta Utes, and they were always good and kind people, and brave, too. You know they were always at war with the Pawnees, Sioux, and Cheyennes, and in fact with pretty much all the Plains people, and they generally managed to hold up their end pretty well, too."

"Well," said Mr. Sturgis, "when can you get ready to start?"

"Why, I reckon we can get off soon after day to-morrow morning, if you think best," said Hugh.

"By all means," said Mr. Sturgis. "You haven't wasted any time, have you? Got everything ready?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "everything. I was thinking that maybe we would not take much grub along with us; not more than enough to last for six or eight days,

and then we could buy the supplies for the main trip at Laramie, if you think best."

"That's a very good idea, Hugh," said Mr. Sturgis, "and you had better do it. I will give you an order on the store at Laramie for whatever you want, and you can travel light until you get there; then you will have to load up heavy, but there is a good road down into the Park, I hear, and perhaps you can cache a part of your supplies down there, after you get there."

"I guess that's a good idea," said Hugh. "Maybe we'll do it."

"Well," said Hugh, after a pause, "if it's all settled we start to-morrow morning, I reckon I'll say good-night and go to bed."

Jack and his uncle sat a while longer in front of the fire talking, and then they went to bed.

CHAPTER V

THE START FOR NORTH PARK

It was just gray dawn next morning when Jack awoke and tumbled out of bed. As he passed the corral on his way down to the bunk house, he saw Hugh moving about among the horses, and entering, found that the pack animals were all saddled.

"Hello, son!" said Hugh, "I'm glad to see you stirring. We want to get our loads out, so that as soon as we've eaten breakfast we can pack up and go. You better roll up that bed of yours and bring it down here and put it with mine over there against the fence, and then we want to bring down the grub and the mess kit, and make up our packs."

For a little time both were busy journeying to and fro between the house and the corral, carrying down loads of food, the small mess kit packed in a soap box, the ax, the hatchet, the Dutch oven, packages of ammunition, and their guns. Hugh showed Jack how to lash together the six pieces which made up the two uprights and the ridge pole of their small tent, and then with a number of pieces of canvas and some lengths of rope, Hugh began to make up the packs for the pack animals.

"While I'm working at this, son," he said, "do you go up and put the saddles on the riding horses. Don't cinch them up, but just draw the latigos tight enough to hold the saddles in place, and have the bridles handy; and, by the way, you'd better get that coil of half-inch rope that's in the storeroom. We'll take all that along, for we may need picket ropes before we get back.

Ropes are something that are awful easy lost on a trip."

Jack got the rope, which he threw down with the other things over which Hugh was working, and then went up and saddled Pawnee and Hugh's black. He watered both horses, and then tied them in their stalls and left them munching their hay.

When he returned to the corral, Hugh had apparently finished his work, but while they had three pack horses, there were only two loads piled up. Jack looked about for a third, and Hugh noticing this, said, "You see, son, we've got so little to pack that we may as well put it all on two horses and let the third one go without a load. You see, when we buy our grub at Laramie, we can stick a good part of it on him, and put more on the other horses as well. As it is now, neither of the loaded horses will have had more than half what he ought to carry."

The call to breakfast came about this time, and after the meal was over all hands went down to the corral and stood around while Hugh and Jack packed their horses. A few moments later they had mounted, turned their pack train loose, and after shaking hands all around and saying good-by to Mr. Sturgis, they started down the valley. For some miles the ride was a familiar one to Jack, for he had passed over it a number of times on his hunting trips and on his way to the Powell ranch. He had nothing special to do except to keep the pack animals close up to Hugh and to prevent them from turning off and trying to return to the ranch. This they kept doing for the first few miles, and at last Jack quite lost patience with them and began to ride fast after them, chasing them back at a gallop so that at times they ran ahead of Hugh. After he had been doing this some little time, Hugh stopped and motioned to him to come up to him. When Jack had done so, Hugh said, "If I were you, son, I'd be more

quiet with the horses. The more you run them, the harder they'll be to manage, and you're liable to wear out the horse you're riding if you keep charging up and down in this way. You can always handle a horse easier if you do it quietly than if you lose your temper. You know we've talked about that two or three times before, and I've told you that your way of getting mad at a horse did not go."

Jack felt quite penitent when Hugh spoke to him in this way, and answered: "I know you are right, Hugh; I do get mad at these miserable horses. They seem to have no sense at all, and keep trying to turn around and go back."

"Well, now," said Hugh, "I'll tell you. You say they have no sense. Perhaps they don't understand what we're trying to do and where we are trying to go. I'll go over there and sit down and smoke, and while I'm doing that it might be a good idea for you take each one of the horses off by itself and tell it where we are going to, and why we are going, and why he must not go back."

For a moment Jack felt rather silly, and then he burst out laughing and said, "Hugh, you are the queerest chap I ever saw. I never met anybody that could make a fellow see so plainly what a fool he was making of himself. It's pretty silly to get angry at these horses because they don't want to leave their range; how could they be expected to know anything about going in one direction or another? I will try to keep my temper better, and handle the horses with better judgment."

"Do so," said Hugh. "But now, I tell you what we can do. Suppose you lead for a while if you feel like it, and I'll follow and drive the horses. All you've got to do is to keep straight ahead down the valley, and along toward night we'll come to the mouth of the Muddy and camp there."

"No, sir!" said Jack. "You go ahead and lead; there's where you belong, and I'll follow and drive the horses; it will give me a lesson in patience, and that is something that I need. You and the Indians we have hunted with have taught me to be patient in hunting, but I have not learned to be patient with horses."

"All right," said Hugh, "I'll go ahead, or I'll come behind, just whichever you please; but if I'm to go ahead, you drive the horses with good sense."

"I'll try," said Jack, and from that time on the horses, very largely owing to the way in which they were treated, went along much better.

There was little that was interesting on the road for the greater part of the day. On either side of the stream stretched the wide sage plain of silvery green. Beyond this plain, to the right, rose the tall naked hills, almost blood red, while to the left, as far off, was a yellow, chalky bluff. Among the red hills Jack had several times been hunting deer and elk, and just beyond the chalky bluff was Bate's Hole, where Jack had killed his first mule deer.

It was but a little after noon when Hugh stopped his horse, and when Jack had come close to him, said, "Son, there are some antelope over this next hill, and we need fresh meat; why not slip off your horse and go up to the top of the next hill and see if you can find a buck that you can kill."

"All right," said Jack. He jumped from the saddle, threw down the reins and started for the crest of the ridge beyond. As he slowly and carefully advanced, he saw, not far ahead of him, a pair of small horns, which he knew must belong to a yearling buck antelope, and dropping on his knees, he crept forward until close to the ridge; then slowly raising his head, he saw but a short distance from him a fine young buck antelope looking across the valley and standing broadside on. Jack raised his gun and fired,

and the antelope fell, while a half dozen others not seen before rushed into view from behind the hill and scampered off into the plain. The one that Jack had shot struggled to his feet and stood with lowered head, facing in the direction in which its comrades had gone. Jack threw his rifle to his shoulder again, intending to shoot once more, but the antelope looked as if it were badly wounded, and he did not think that it could run far. Turning about, he signaled Hugh to come on, saw him ride over to Pawnee, grasp the bridle reins and start towards him. Then Jack slowly walked over the crest and up to the antelope. There was, of course, a possibility that the animal might run, and Jack cocked his rifle and held it at a "ready," but the antelope, shot through the lungs, was breathing heavily and was in no condition to run away. Still, it kept its feet, and Jack was doubtful as to how to handle it. He certainly did not care to go in front of it and take it by the horns, and he did not like to put down his gun and attempt to stab it with his butcher knife. Finally he put down the gun close by the antelope, and stepped up behind it with drawn butcher knife, caught its hind leg and tried to hamstring it. It was not until then that he realized something of the strength of even so small an animal as this. It kicked and struggled, and Jack, while he managed to keep his hold of the leg, was shaken and twisted about in a way that greatly astonished him. He dared not let go, for fear the antelope would run away, but he had no idea as to how long the struggle would last. However, after a minute or two, which seemed to him like a very long time, the antelope's efforts grew weaker, and finally it fell over on its side. By the time Hugh had come up with the horses, Jack had cut the little buck's throat.

"What was the matter?" said Hugh. "You seemed to be having quite an active time down here."

"Active time!" said Jack, "I should say so! I

had no idea that an animal as small as this antelope could shake me up as he did. I made a poor shot, for I hit him too high up, and from the way he breathed, I think I just cut the upper part of his lungs. I shall have to practice shooting if I am going to help keep the camp supplied with meat this summer."

"Oh, don't you bother about practicing," Hugh said. "Two or three shots will get you back into your old way again, but that's a regular green-horn trick to shoot too high. It seems to me that mighty few people know how low the life lies in any animal. I keep telling you where to shoot at in an antelope, and you must remember it."

"Of course you do, Hugh," said Jack; "I know that well enough. I try to shoot at that little curl of hair; that's what I aimed at, but you see I drew my sight too coarse."

"Well," said Hugh, "just a little shooting is what you need, and you'll get plenty of that in a very short time now."

Hugh got off his horse, and they began to skin the antelope, which was a very short operation. The hide strips off an antelope very easily, just as the hide strips off a deer. Jack noticed that on his side Hugh kept turning under the edge of the skin, so that the hair side was always next to the ground or else turned well under the edge. Jack, on the other hand, simply laid the hide on his side on the ground, and twisted and pulled it about; sometimes the flesh sides would come together, and some of the antelope hair rubbed off on the body.

Hugh said to him, "You might as well learn to skin an antelope right, son. You know the hair smells quite strong, and if you let the hair touch the meat, the meat gets this smell and tastes of it. Lots of people don't like that taste, and so. I always make it a point to keep the hair from touching the skin. You see how I'm

working it on my side, always keeping the flesh side to the body."

"I see," said Jack, "and now that you have told me, I see why you do it. Of course I've tasted the flavor of the antelope hide in the meat, and I don't like it a bit, myself. I will remember that after this in skinning. Are there other animals, the meat of which is affected by the touching of the hide?"

"Well," said Hugh, "the meat of the tame sheep gets an awful strong taste if the wool is allowed to rub against it, and sometimes I think the meat of the wild sheep gets the same taste; anyhow, it's just as well to keep the hair side of the hide away from the meat of the animal it belongs to. At best the hides of these animals are full of dirt and dust, and there is a common prejudice against making that sort of thing your food. We have to eat a lot of it, of course, but at the same time we don't want to eat any more than we have got to. You take the hide of a deer or an elk or a buffalo, just after you have stripped it off, rub your hand down the outside of it, and see what a lot of dirt you will get on your hand. Of course, the Indians don't think much about a little thing like that, and perhaps the average plainsman don't, but I've noticed a few times how very dirty these hides are, and it seems to me worth while to be as clean as we can with the skinning."

The antelope being lifted off the hide, its body was rested now for a moment on the top of a sage bush, while Hugh went to his saddle and from one of the strings behind it untied a cotton sack. The antelope was quickly quartered and the pieces packed in this sack, which was lashed on the unloaded horse, and they went on.

Camp was made that night some miles above where the Muddy runs into the Medicine Bow River. There was no timber, but the grass was good, and there was

plenty of sage brush and some dry willow bushes, so that they had fuel enough to cook their meals. By the time the horses were picketed and the coffee was boiling, it was dark.

The day had been warm and bright, and as the night was clear, they decided that it was not necessary to put up the tent. After supper they sat by the fire, Jack questioning Hugh about the country they were going to.

"You have talked to me a good deal about the Northern countries, but I don't know that you have ever said anything about the Parks of Colorado, and I don't know just what they are. Of course, we will see them before long, but I should like to have some idea of the country before we reach it."

"Well," said Hugh, "I can tell you pretty clearly what these Parks are like. They are just big basins of open country lying between ranges of high mountains. In some places they are fifteen or twenty miles across and twice as long as they are wide, and the mountains on either side are very high—not like the mountains back of the ranch, but running away up above timber line. There are no people in North Park, though I believe within the last two or three years some folks have begun to drive cattle in there for the summer; but in Middle Park and South Park, which are nearer Denver, there are some settlements. In North Park and in Middle Park there is lots of game—in fact, I reckon it's one the greatest game countries there is left now. You will find elk, deer, antelope, sheep, and maybe a few buffalo, but no moose, and no white goats. If you imagine a big plain like the Basin we have just come over, with high mountains all around it, you will have a pretty good idea of North Park.

"There's a wagon road from Laramie into the Park—a good wagon road, but after you pass Pinkham's

you won't see any settlers until you get over the divide into Middle Park. The North Platte heads in North Park, and, of course, there are no fish in that. Then you ride over a low divide and strike one of the heads of Grand River, and there, even up in the shallow water in a small brook you can catch lots of trout."

"Why is it, Hugh, that there are no trout in the Platte River?"

"I reckon a thousand people have asked that question, and nobody has ever been able to answer it, so far is I know. We all just know that there are no trout in the stream, but why it is, nobody can tell. Neither in the Platte River nor in any stream that runs into it, so far as I know, are there any trout, and it does seem queer." *

"Why, yes, Hugh, that does seem queer; but where do the trout come from that are in the other Rocky Mountain streams? I know that they are not the same kind of trout that we have back East. Those have red spots, and these have black ones."

"You just can't prove it by me," said Hugh; "but I've always believed that they came from the other side of the mountain, over the range. How they got over to this side, I do not know, but I reckon that there are ways for fish to move about and get scattered over the country, that maybe you and I don't know anything about. There's one place up north of here where there's a little spring right on the crest of the mountain, from which the water flows both ways. That is to say, it flows down into the Yellowstone on one side and into the Snake River on the other, and so from this same spring water goes to the Atlantic Ocean and to the Pacific Ocean. Now, of course, it might be possible for a trout from the west side of the range to push his way up a western stream until he got into this little spring, and then he might push his

* In recent years the North Platte River has been stocked with trout.

way down the stream, which runs east, and where one fish went another might follow; and so that stream might get stocked. It may be that in times past there have been a number of places like that where a fish could climb over the range. Mind, I don't say that is the way that it happened, but it seems to me it might have been that way."

"That's mighty interesting, Hugh," said Jack; "I never heard of that place before. What do they call it?"

"Why," said Hugh, "they have a good name for it, they call it 'Two Ocean Spring.' Long ago I heard of it from mountain men a great many times, and I have been there once or twice. It's in the right high mountains just east of that Yellowstone Park that we came down through two years ago. They call the two little creeks that run out from it, Atlantic Creek and Pacific Creek, and these seem to me to be very good names for them, too. I heard that not very long ago a government outfit crossed over there and made a map of the country."

"Jerusalem!" said Jack; "that's one of the places I'd like to go to."

"Well," said Hugh, "you're likely to see just as pretty places as that in these mountains this summer. The little pool up there, that these two streams run out of, is just like any other little shallow lake on top of a divide, and there isn't any wonderful scenery there. It's a good game country, though not any better, I think, than what we came through when we made that trip with Joe two years ago; but it is a pretty country to travel through; open parks and quaking aspen groves and high peaks of mountains sticking up every little while. Oh, yes, it's a real nice country."

"Well," said Jack, "I would like to go there, but dear me! what a lot of country there is out here, and how much time it would take to visit all of it!"

"That's so," said Hugh, "there's a right smart of country that I have never seen, and I have been out here a pretty considerable time."

For a little while both sat silently looking into the fire, and listening to the sharp barks and the shrill wailings of a coyote perched on a hill not far from them. The noise made seemed to Jack to be enough for a half dozen animals, and yet he suspected that very likely it was all made by one. At last he spoke to Hugh about it, and said, "How many of those coyotes do you think there are yelling out there, Hugh?"

"Well, I don't know," said Hugh; "there must be at least one; he makes plenty of noise, doesn't he?"

"I should think so," said Jack. "I thought there must be at least half a dozen."

"No, I don't think so," said Hugh; "if there were more than one, you would be apt to distinguish their voices, and there would be barking at different times. Instead of that, if you will listen to this fellow you'll hear him bark and then howl and stop, and then bark again. I reckon he's hungry, and is trying to call up a partner, and to-morrow morning they will go hunting together and try to kill a rabbit or two, or maybe pull down an antelope. They are queer beasts."

"Yes," said Jack, "and mighty cunning, I expect."

"Lord, yes," said Hugh, "they are cunning enough. A fox is a fool to one of those coyotes."

CHAPTER VI

TO LARAMIE AND NORTH PARK

They were up before light next morning, and by the time the sun had risen, the little train had started off southward. Crossing two low divides, they found themselves, before noon, on Rock Creek, and traveled up that without incident until late in the day. Everywhere scattered over the valley and the bluffs, antelope were feeding in good numbers.

About the middle of the afternoon Hugh proposed that they should stop and smoke and let the animals feed for a little while, and they did so. The men lounged in the shade of a clump of bullberry bushes, for the sun was hot. After half an hour's rest, Hugh said, "Well, son, let's gather up these horses and be moving. We want to get beyond Rock Creek Station to-night. I don't think much of camping in or close to a town, and especially not close to Rock Creek. There's where they unload considerable freight for the ranches up north, and there's usually a good big crowd of bull-whackers there, and most of them drunk. Let's get by there before we camp."

They were stepping out to get the horses, when Hugh stretched out his hand and touched Jack, saying, "Hold on a minute, son, what's that coming down the creek?"

Jack looked, and could see far off a flock of birds coming. They were stretched out in a line and seemed to have white bodies with black tips to their wings.

"What are they, Hugh?" he said, as they both crouched on the ground and watched the distant birds.

"I'm not sure," replied Hugh. "There are mighty

few birds that are white with black tips to their wings. These might be white geese or white cranes or gulls or pelicans. They can't be gulls, for they don't fly right, and they are not white cranes, I am sure. They are either geese or pelicans, and we'll soon know which."

The birds drew nearer and nearer, and presently Hugh said, "They are not geese, either; they must be pelicans. I hope they'll come over us, for they'll make a fine show, and I reckon they will follow the water."

Very slowly, as it seemed to Jack, the great birds approached. He was astonished at their tremendous spread of wing and at their curious appearance. They flew in single file, nine of them, the bill of each just about so far from the tail of the bird before it. Their necks were crooked so that the back of the head seemed to rest on the body, and Jack could not but think that in this matter they carried themselves just like herons. Their enormous yellow bills shone in the bright sunlight, and the feet stretched out behind were yellow, but seemingly paler than the bills. To Jack two or three of them seemed to have a wash of gold color on the side of the head, but except for that they were pure white all over except the black wing tips. On steady wing they followed the windings of the stream, not more than thirty or forty feet above the water, passed the travelers without noticing them, and then disappeared down the stream.

"My!" exclaimed Jack, as they grew smaller in the distance, "that was a fine sight, Hugh, I never expected to see anything quite like that. I did not know that there were many pelicans in this country, though, of course, there are plenty of them further west, at least that's what the books say."

"Yes," answered Hugh; "there are lots of them out West, especially in Utah and Nevada, so I've heard, but there are a few scattered all over the Western coun-

try. Now and then one sees them up in Montana, and sometimes down here, and pretty much everywhere, but it's a long time since I've seen a lot together this way."

"Well," said Jack, "I'm mighty glad they came along just when they did."

A few minutes later the train was in motion, and not long before sunset they passed through the town of Rock Creek. As Hugh had said, much freighting was going on here, and many wagons with white tilts were drawn up side by side, while at a distance on the prairie, herds of stock fed, each watched by a herder. Scattered about near the different groups of wagons, were the camps of the bull-whackers, and a few men were seen, though most of them were presumably in the cook tents eating their suppers. The train had almost passed through the camps, when from between two tents a hundred yards off to one side, Jack saw a little man run out, turn and run down toward another camp, and almost immediately behind him was another much larger man who carried in his hand a good stout club. The little man did not run so fast as the one behind him, and presently the pursuer overtook him and began to beat him with the club. The second or third blow knocked the small man flat to the ground, but he did not remain there, and springing to his feet, he turned and caught the tall man around the neck with his left arm and in a moment the tall man fell to the ground, while the little fellow walked off. It had all happened quickly, and almost by the time Jack had called Hugh's attention to it, the little fellow had quickened his steps and was now running away from the camp. As Hugh and Jack looked back they could see dark stains spreading over the white undershirt that the large man wore, and it was evident that the little fellow had stabbed his antagonist. Almost at once from three or four directions men came running

toward the wounded man, and a little later two or three men rushed out from tents, carrying rifles and cartridge belts. Jack had said to Hugh, "Oh, Hugh, that man is wounded; shan't we go over and help him," to which Hugh had replied, "Don't you do it, son; let us get ahead as fast as we can and not mix up with these fellows' quarrels. You can't tell what these half-drunken men will do. They are liable to try to knock one of us off our horse if the notion takes them. The best thing we can do is to put as much ground between them and us as we can. There's one comfort," he added; "if they do shoot at us they can't hit us."

Meantime, shots were sounding out on the flat, and Jack could see the little man running hard for the distant bluff, while behind him two or three men were running or staggering and shooting with pistols and rifles. Before very long, Hugh and Jack had put two or three miles between Rock Creek and themselves, and just after sundown they camped in a pleasant part of the valley where there was good grass and water, but not much wood.

While Hugh was cooking supper, a man came along on horseback and stopped to speak with them.

Hugh asked him if he would not alight and have a cup of coffee, and he accepted.

"Have you men just come from Rock Creek?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Hugh. "We have just passed through there an hour ago. A lively place, isn't it?"

"Too lively for me," said the stranger; "I've got charge of that bull train, and those drunken bull-whackers will break my heart if I don't get them out from the railroad before very long. Three or four of them got drunk and quit on me the other day, and I've been into Laramie to try and get some more. I've got three that are coming up on the passenger to-night."

"Well," said Hugh, "we saw a couple of them having fun with each other as we came through. There was a big man pounding a little man, and the little man turned and cut the big man, and then pretty much the whole camp turned out and chased the little fellow off over the prairie, and the last we heard they were still shooting at him."

"Yes," said the foreman, "that don't surprise me a bit. That little fellow was Wild Tex, and the big fellow was Donovan. Donovan has always been picking on Tex, and when he gets drunk he is worse than ever. I've been expecting that Tex would kill him, but he's a mighty patient little cuss and hasn't done it yet."

"Well," said Hugh, "he had a good chance to do it to-day, and if Donovan gets well I hope he'll have learned a lesson."

"I hope so," said the foreman, "but I don't think he is one of the kind that learns lessons."

The foreman sat with them until they had finished supper, and then getting up said, "Well, I must be going. I've got to round up my outfit and get them started to-morrow morning, if I can. A mighty good cup of coffee you gave me. So long."

The next night they camped close to Laramie, and early the next day went into the town and purchased their supplies, not forgetting a pair of rubber boots for each. It was only the middle of the morning when the loads were put on and they started south over the open prairie on their way to North Park. Now Jack felt that the trip had really begun.

The ride over the open prairie was delightful. The mountains toward which they were journeying showed many strange shapes and curious colors, and the wagon road which they were following was constantly dipping down steep hills and climbing others. The first few miles showed them many cattle and horses, but no

game, but later, as they approached the mountains, a few antelope began to be seen, and there were many well-known western birds of the dry country, which now for two years Jack had not seen.

Towards evening they reached Beaver Creek, a tributary of the Laramie, and after following it up for a few miles, camped for the night. The day had been a long one, and not long after supper both Hugh and Jack turned into their blankets and were soon sound asleep.

Off again at an early hour next morning, they traveled for a long way through the pleasant green timber, where the foot fall of the horses made no sound on the forest floor of dead pine needles, and where no sound was heard except occasionally the call of a gray jay, the rattle of a woodpecker's bill on a dead limb, or the soft whistle of a crossbill in the tree tops.

Jack felt obliged to follow behind Hugh, though he really wanted to ride beside him and talk about the pleasant country through which they were passing. Still it was his business to watch the horses, especially so now during the first day of travel through the timber, where a pack horse, unless watched, might possibly get hung up by a tree and break something or disturb his pack.

It was this morning, after leaving camp on the Beaver, that they came to what is called the Neck of the Park, and passing over the divide, followed down the valley, at first narrow, but gradually becoming wider, which at length lead them to a more open country. They passed Pinkham's Ranch, and then took the right-hand road, which Hugh said led to the mines at Hahn's Peak.

Soon after leaving Pinkham's, they passed a cabin, near which was a small spring, from which bubbled up a constant supply of cool water abundantly charged

with what Jack thought might be carbonate of soda. At all events the water was fresh, sparkling, and delicious, and he thought that if it were nearer to a market it might be bottled and sold.

Soon after they left the soda water fountain, they crossed a high steep ridge and then passed down a gentle descent toward the North Platte River. On either side of the trail they were following the mountains were rough, and weathered pillars of granite stood out bare among the ancient cedars on the hillside.

They camped in the beautiful valley of the North Platte on the edge of a splendid level meadow covered with fine grass, on which in the evening and again next morning Jack saw from three to four hundred antelope at a time. There were also ducks, rabbits, sage hens, and blue grouse; abundant food, Jack thought, for any hunters who are satisfied with enough.

That evening Jack wandered away from camp and found in a clump of willows, not more than a quarter of a mile from it, a curious collection of long-eared owls. He could not think what brought so many of them to this place, unless it was for a shelter during the day, which would enable them to get out of the bright glare of the sun, for nowhere else in the neighborhood could shade be found except in this growth of willows. Here, too, in the tops of the willows he noticed a number of domed nests of magpies, and from the calls of the birds that he heard around about, he felt sure that they were occupied.

When he got back to camp, Hugh said to him, "Do you know, son, that last antelope you killed is pretty nearly gone? We ought to have another one, or at all events some meat before long. You might start out to-night, though it's a little late, or we can lay over here to-morrow until noon and you can go out and try to kill something."

"Say we put it off until to-morrow morning, Hugh,"

said Jack, " and I'll start out early, and see what I can do."

As soon as breakfast was over next morning and it was light, Jack started off along the edge of the valley to look for an antelope. He did not have to look far to see a great many, for the bluffs and river bottom were covered with them, but he walked for some time before he could find any of the animals so placed that they could be approached. However, at length, as he cautiously peeped over a point of the bluff which stretched down toward the river, he saw well beyond it a single buck antelope, and what was more to the purpose, about half way between the antelope and the point of the bluff, a clump of willows which would give him an opportunity to approach it. Luckily, no wind was blowing. He drew back a little and descending the bluff, rounded its point so that the willows concealed him from the buck, and then hurrying along toward the patch of brush, soon found himself within a hundred yards of the antelope. By a careful shot he killed it, and a little later with the hams and saddle on his back he was on his way toward the camp.

After the antelope had been skinned and put in the sack, it was loaded on a pack, and they started on again.

The country was open and covered with sage brush, and often from the high bluffs they could see little lakes, which shone like silver in the sun. They camped early.

That evening, after supper, as they sat about the campfire, Jack asked Hugh many questions about trapping.

" Well, son," said Hugh, " trapping is a big subject, and it's pretty hard to learn much about it, except by setting your traps. You'll have a chance to set plenty of traps for beaver, and beaver is what we always used to call the hardest fur to trap."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "what about trapping wolves? Are they not worth trapping? Are they hard to catch, or is it not much trouble to catch young wolves?"

"Those that are one to two years old are easy caught, but if a wolf has been traveling the prairie for three or four years, he gets to be pretty smart. Wolf skins are worth from four to six dollars apiece, and so, of course, wolves are worth trapping, but in old times we always used to poison them, and that was cheaper and a whole lot less trouble than catching them in traps. Besides that, a wolf is a powerful, strong animal, and he can pack off a trap with him just as if he weren't carrying anything at all. Then, too, on the prairie there is usually nothing to fasten a trap to, and unless you carry a lot of iron picket pins with you, you lose your traps about as fast as you can set them."

"You have told me all about poisoning wolves, Hugh," said Jack, "but you never said anything about trapping, and I don't understand how you fix the bait in a trap. You certainly can't put it on the pan, for you don't want to catch the wolf by the nose, and if you did, he would pull free."

"Of course he would," said Hugh; "you want to catch a wolf by the foot, and to do that you must scatter your bait around the trap so that he will put his foot in it; but after all, in trapping wolves you don't use bait at all. Generally you use a scent, something that a wolf smells and wants to smell more of, and you raise that above the ground a foot or eighteen inches and set your trap so that he will step into it when he tries to get near the scent."

"That's news to me," said Jack; "I supposed that you always set your traps with something to eat."

"No," said Hugh; "very seldom. The beaver medicine that we use is just something to smell of; not to eat at all. But about wolf bait: the worst smelling

thing that you can get hold of is about the best bait for wolves. Some people use asafetida or other drugs that they can buy in the shops, but the best thing that I know of is to take a piece of fresh meat, put it with some grease in a wide-mouthed bottle or jug, and let it stand in the heat for a week or two, until it gets to smelling very badly. Then add to it some beaver castor and about a quart of oil or grease, and cork it up tight. Of course, when you set your trap you must be careful not to leave any scent of yourself on it. Some people smoke their traps every time they set them, and if they can, use a fire of green pine boughs, but I don't count much on that. I believe that though smell of fire may kill the human scent, it makes the wolves suspicious. I think the better way is to wear gloves when you set your traps, and to be careful always to keep the traps to the windward of you. Don't let the wind blow from you to the traps. Of course, in setting, you have to dig out a hole in the ground large enough to let the trap set in it, so that the jaws will be just level with the ground. Then sprinkle over the trap a light covering of dust, and after the trap is set take a stick eighteen inches or two feet long, sharpen one end of it, dip the other end in your bottle of scent, and stick the sharpened end in the ground so that the end with the scent on it will pretty nearly overhang the trap.

"You have to fasten your trap, of course. If you don't do that the wolf will carry it away. The best way to fasten it is to bore a hole through the end of a stick three feet long and as big as the calf of your leg, pass the end of a chain through that, and then drive a staple through the ring and into the log. Then if the wolf gets into the trap, he is not held in one place struggling to get out, and twisting the chain, and so likely to break it, but he starts off dragging the stick, which makes a plain trail, catching every now

and then in the sage brush and so making him go slowly. It doesn't give him a chance to fight the trap. If you go to your traps every day, you will find that a wolf will not drag the clog very far before you overtake him. Then you probably have to shoot him.

"As I say, there is a lot of work in trapping wolves that way, and I would hate to have to earn my living by doing it. If it should happen that we should get to any place where wolves are plenty we can set two or three traps for them, but I don't want to do that until we have tried beaver trapping, because I am afraid we will lose some of our traps."

"I had no idea, Hugh," said Jack, "that wolves were so cunning and so powerful."

"Yes," said Hugh, "they are strong animals, and when they have grown old they are pretty smart. They are mighty tough, too. Haven't I ever told you about that wolf that Billy Collins killed three or four years ago at the ranch?"

"No," said Jack, "I don't think so."

"Well," said Hugh, "I only speak of it to show how tough a wolf is. Billy had gone out just in the gray dawn of the morning, and just as he shut the door behind him, a big wolf came around the corner of the house. Billy jumped back into the house to get his gun, and the wolf ran off and stopped to look around on the top of that little knoll south of the house. He was about a hundred yards off, and Billy fired and the wolf yelled and fell down, and then started off. Billy and old Shep, the house dog, started after him, and when they got up to where he had stood, they found the ground all covered with blood and a broad blood trail leading off over the hills. Billy started on the trail, expecting to find the wolf over the next hill, but he followed him for two miles before he overtook him, and then the wolf was strong enough to sit up and fight off the dog, and needed another shot to kill him.

But when Bill went up to him he found that the bullet had gone almost the whole length of the wolf and had smashed one of its shoulders. I had a friend who was trapping down in South Park and set two or three traps for wolves, and one morning when he found one of them gone, he went back and got two or three hounds that were at the ranch and took after the wolf through the snow, for it was winter. They chased that wolf with the dogs for thirteen hours before they got him, and he came mighty near getting away then."

CHAPTER VII

A TALK ABOUT BEAVER

"WELL, now, Hugh," asked Jack, "what can you tell me about beaver trapping?"

"Why, son," said Hugh, "I can tell you whole lot about beaver trapping. There is a great big book to be written yet about beaver and how to trap them, and when that book is written there will be enough left out of it to make another book."

"I've always heard," said Jack, "that beaver was about the smartest animal there was, and the one most difficult to trap, but, of course, I don't know anything about it. I have seen a few dams and the tops of a few houses up north, but you can't learn much about beaver by looking at his work."

"No," said Hugh, "not much, and before you can learn anything about trapping beaver, you've got to know something about the nature of the beast."

"Well, that's the very thing I want you to tell me about," replied Jack. "I want to find out all that I can about the beaver, before I see any. In the first place, suppose you tell me how big they are."

"Well," said Hugh, "they are the biggest gnawing animal we have in this country. A full grown beaver will weigh from forty to sixty pounds; perhaps big ones will average as heavy as a half sack of flour."

"My," said Jack, "that's bigger than I supposed they were. I have always heard of the beaver as a little animal. It seems to me that it's a big one."

"Yes," said Hugh, "it's quite a sizable animal, and if you've got a half dozen to pack to your camp on

your back you'll think they are pretty good sized animals before you get them all in."

"Well, where do they live?" said Jack.

"I reckon," replied Hugh, "that they live all over this country of North America, from Texas north as far as there are any trees. You know that the food of the beaver is the bark of certain trees, and, of course, they can't live anywhere except where these trees grow, but I have heard of them 'way down in Texas, and I know that the Northern Indians away up toward the limit of trees trap beaver a plenty, so that I expect they are found over the whole country. I have heard your uncle say that there were some beaver in Europe, but over there I reckon they have been about cleaned out. Too many people killing 'em, I reckon."

"Well," said Jack, "I guess they are found all over North America, north of the United States, anyhow; because I know that the coat of arms of Canada has the beaver on it."

"Yes, I reckon the beaver was the reason that Canada was settled, and in fact the beaver was what led men into all this western country. In the early days, soon after Lewis and Clark went across the continent, the fur traders began to push their way into this western country, north and south, and beaver was what they were after. You see in those days it was a mighty valuable fur, worth a good deal more than it's ever been since.

"Just as soon as the white men came into the country and found the Indians wearing robes made of beaver, and clothing trimmed with beaver and other fur, they began to trade for the robes, and to tell the Indians that if they'd bring them in beaver skins they'd give them knives and needles and beads, and later, rum, and, of course, that set the Indians to killing beaver as fast as they could.

"But, as I say, it wasn't until after Lewis and

Clark got across the continent that trapping began down in the United States. Along in the '30's, though, white men began to get up fur companies and to hire the best trappers that they could get, and they pushed out in all directions, up the Arkansas, up the Platte, and up the Missouri River, setting their traps in every valley and cleaning out the beaver as fast as they could. Then they got into the mountains, and there they found more beaver and better fur, and there, too, is where they began to run across Indians to bother them. The Blackfeet were the worst. They used to steal our horses and take our traps, and now and then a scalp, when they could, and they made us a great deal of trouble. The prices for fur were good until in the 40's, just before I got out into the country. Then they fell, and for the next twelve or fifteen years every old trapper that you met was growling about the fact that beaver weren't worth anything any more.

"Your uncle tells me that there has been a whole lot of books written about those early trapping days, but I have never seen any of them. Of course, then it was all wild country and lots of things were happening, and a man had to keep his eyes open pretty wide. As I have told you, the Indian wars did not begin until long after that, and most of the trouble that we had with the Indians was with parties of wild young men, who had started off to war, and were anxious to get glory, and to go back to their villages and brag about what they had done. The fights were with these little parties and not with the tribes. But, at the same time, a bullet or an arrow from one of these little parties would kill a man just as dead as if he had been fighting with a tribe."

"That's all mighty interesting, Hugh," said Jack. "It seems to me that you never get through telling me interesting things about this country in the old times. I wish that I knew how to write, so that I

could put it all down, and some day write a big book about your adventures."

"Well," said Hugh, "I'm mighty glad you can't do that. I reckon if I were to see you taking all these notes down in a notebook I wouldn't talk so much as I do."

"Well," said Jack, "if I knew how to write, you bet I'd write such a book. I sort of wonder that Uncle George has never done that. He spends a great deal of his time writing in winter, when he is back in New York."

"Well," Hugh went on, "let's go ahead about the beaver. You know that they build dams across streams to hold back the water, and that they build houses in the ponds that they make. Have you ever looked carefully at these dams?"

"No, I don't believe I have," Jack replied; "people have pointed them out to me, and they've shown me places along the streams where trees and brush had been cut down, and have said to me, 'that's beaver work,' and I have seen piles of sticks in the water and have been told that those were houses, but I never had any idea how any of this work was done."

"They build their dams across streams," said Hugh, "and hold back the water and often spread it over quite a wide space of the valley, and in this water they build their houses. I have always supposed that the ponds were made as a protection for the animals. You see, they are big and slow. They can't run away from anything that wants to kill them, and so the only means they have of getting away from their enemies is to dive down into the water and swim under it. Then their enemies, whether they are humans or animals, can't follow them. Of course, I have no more idea than you how the beaver got the idea of protecting themselves in this way, but I believe it is for protection they make these ponds, and for nothing

else. You'll see that their houses are built out in pretty deep water, and when they are scared from shore they go out and get into their houses, and if somebody tries to pull down the houses where they live, then they can swim to the shore and hide there, with their noses just above water."

"Well," said Jack, "that's news to me. I always accepted the fact that they built dams to hold the water back, but I never had any idea why they did it."

"No," said Hugh, "I reckon not. I never heard anybody that did know why, but I am just giving you my idea. You'll hear a whole lot of stories about the wonderful things that beaver do, and in many of these stories there is not a grain of truth, but they do wonderful things enough as it is. You don't have to lie about them to make them out mighty smart animals."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I have heard of some of these wonderful things. I think some of the books say that the beaver can cut down a tree so that it will fall exactly where they want it to lie, just as a lumberman in the woods will fell a tree where he wants it to lie. They say that when the beaver want to build a new dam they look along the stream until they find a place where there is a tree of just the right length, and then they fell it across the stream for a foundation for their dam."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I have heard that story, too, but I don't believe it. Beaver will cut down trees, and mighty big ones, too, but I don't believe that they can cut down a tree so that it will fall in a particular direction, and if it does fall in a direction to be useful to them, that's just nothing but accident. What they cut trees down for is for the food that they know is growing on the tree. They want to get at the tender bark of the branches for their food, and that's what they cut the trees for. All the same, it's mighty won-

derful sometimes to see what big trees they will cut down, and how smart they are about cutting them. They will gnaw a deep gouge below and then gnaw another cut eight or ten inches above, and pull the chip out; a chip just about as big as an axman would cut out with an ax. They are smart about that, but they haven't any idea which way the tree is going to fall."

"Well," said Jack, "that seems natural enough, and besides that, I should think that even if beaver did know how to fell the tree to lie in a particular direction, they could not always do it with these crooked old cottonwood trees that grow along the streams."

"Yes," said Hugh, "some of them are so crooked and grow so slantwise that no axman could fell them the way he wanted."

"I have seen it stated in books, too," Jack went on, "that they always fell a tree just long enough to reach across the stream, and no longer. I never could see how that could be, because it would be impossible for beaver to measure the height of a tree."

"Oh," said Hugh, "that's all nonsense; they don't do anything like that. There is one thing which they do, though, that people don't give them credit for, or at least I have never heard anybody speak about it; they'll build a dam across a creek and raise the water, and make a big wide pond. Maybe the water flows over the top of the dam pretty freely for its whole length. Such a pond will be lived in for a good many years. During all those years the rain and the melting snow, and all the water that falls, carries down from the hills soil and dead leaves and sticks and a whole lot of trash, and after a time the pond fills up and gets too shallow for the beaver to use it. Then maybe they'll raise the dam for its whole length, and make the pond bigger, and then after years of time this larger pond will partly fill up and grow shallow. After

a time the beaver will, perhaps, leave the pond, and go somewhere else to build another. Then, after a few years the dam will rot out and break down, the pond will go dry, the water will get back to its old channel, and grass and willows and other brush will grow up over the old bottom of the pond, and there you've got a big wide flat—what we call a beaver meadow. All along streams all over this western country there are big strips of flat land that have been made just in this way by the beaver."

"I have never thought of that before, Hugh, and I never heard anybody speak of it. The time may come when people will farm on these big flats, never knowing how they were made."

"Yes, that's a fact," said Hugh, "and already there are lots of places down toward the prairie where folks have started ranches on land of just that sort.

"Let me tell you another thing that beaver are smart about. Sometimes they will make a pond in a particular valley, quite a distance from any place where their food grows. Often there are no willows, and the quaking aspen grows only along the foothills, maybe quite a little distance from the edge of their pond. Sometimes they will dig out a ditch or canal all the way from the edge of the pond up close to where the aspen grows. Of course, the water from the pond fills up these ditches, and the beaver will follow them up close to the aspens, cut down their feed there, and cutting the trees and brush into convenient lengths, carry them to the ditches, dump them in and then take and swim with them back to their houses, or the places where they store their food. This always seemed to me pretty smart, because, while it must be a lot of work for them to dig the ditch, it's a tremendous saving of labor for them to be able to float these sticks to where they want them."

"That seems to me mighty intelligent, Hugh, and

I should think, too, that they might have another motive in digging these ditches. If they had to travel two or three hundred yards on dry land, wouldn't there be a good deal of danger of their getting caught away out from the water and killed?"

"Lots of danger," said Hugh, "and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they made these ditches more for their safety than to save themselves work. They are mighty industrious animals, the beaver. You know, if we see a man that is hard at work all the time, we say he works like a beaver. They are busy animals, and they keep at it all the time."

"What animals are there, Hugh, that kill the beaver? I suppose man is the worst enemy it's got, but there must be a lot of others, such as wolves and, perhaps, bears."

"Yes," said Hugh, "a beaver has lots of enemies. As I have said to you, it's heavy and slow; it can't run away nor climb a tree, and it has no special means of defending itself. A beaver's got a good set of teeth, but while he can give one or two pretty strong bites, that would not help him much in a scrap with any animal near his own size.

"A bear, of course, would kill a beaver every time if he could get hold of him; so would a big wolf. A single coyote might not be able to, but two or three coyotes could get away with him in short order.

"Didn't you ever, back East, see a dog get between a woodchuck and his hole? You know the woodchuck will sit up and chatter his teeth, and perhaps he will bite the dog once when the dog runs in, but that's the end of the woodchuck. The beaver has got longer teeth, and can bite a little harder and deeper, but he is not built for fighting, and what's more, he never means to fight if he can help it.

"The wolverine sometimes lies around beaver ponds and, maybe once in a while catches one, but wolverines

are pretty scarce, and I don't think they get many. I believe that the animal that gets more beaver than any other is the lynx. They are small, to be sure, but they are mighty quick, and they have got those long claws, and they can jump on a beaver and cut him up pretty badly before he can get hold of them. I have often seen places where beaver had been killed, and I know it was done by lynxes; that is, by bob-cats, and also by the big gray lynxes. One time, a good many years ago, I saw a lynx waiting to catch a beaver. As it happened, he didn't get him, but he tried hard enough.

"I happened to be riding down William's Fork, and had to pass through a point of timber, and just before I got out to the pond, on the other side, I stopped my horse for a minute to look around and see what I could see. There was a big beaver dam just below me, on the river, and I knew of it, for I had often passed there. I could see nothing, and was just going to start on again, when, as I happened to look over across the creek just opposite me, I saw something move. For a minute I could not tell what it was, and then I saw lying among the sage brush a big bob-cat, whose color matched the ground and the weeds about him so well that it was hard for me to make out his shape. At one end of him, however, there was something black that kept moving regularly in little jerks, and, of course, I knew that this was his tail, and that he was watching something in the stream and getting ready to jump on it. I looked at the stream carefully, and for a moment could not see anything, and then, just below the bob-cat, I made out something swimming in the water, close under the bank, but to save my life I could not tell whether it was a duck, or a muskrat, or what. When this thing, whatever it was, had got nearly to the bob-cat, which kept crouching flatter and flatter all the time, the thing suddenly dived and hit the water a tremendous rap with its tail, and then, of

course, I knew that it was a beaver that had been swimming up stream, and that the bob-cat had seen it, and was waiting for it to get within reach, and then was going to jump on it. Of course, bob-cats don't like the water very well, but all the same, they will go into it for food."

"What did the bob-cat do when the beaver dived, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Oh, after a minute or two," said Hugh, "he seemed to realize that the game was up, and he then got up and walked away into the sage brush. I have often wished that the beaver had come on a little further so that I could have seen the end of the thing, and seen whether beaver or bob-cat would have come out ahead. You see, the beaver must have been swimming in pretty deep water, and, of course, if he had had sense enough to grab the bob-cat and hold on to him, no doubt he could have drowned him, but I don't reckon the beaver would have had sense enough for that; he would have just tried to get away, and I guess he would have succeeded."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "it is interesting to hear of these animals, but as you say, it's pretty hard work to really learn anything about them by reading or hearing people talk. The real way is to see the animals themselves, and I hope we will do that before very long."

"Yes, son, we ought to. In fact, by to-morrow afternoon we ought to get to where there used to be a great big beaver meadow. I don't know, of course, whether we will find any beaver there now or not, but it's a good place to go and look for them. I have seen the time when it was full of beaver, and if we could find it as full now as it was then, we ought to be able to load up a pack horse with fur."

"My!" said Jack; "don't I wish we could. That would be fine."

"Put some more wood on the fire, son," said Hugh, "and I'll smoke my pipe, and then we'll go to bed."

Jack rose from his comfortable seat, and going over to where some cottonwood branches had been dragged together, brought two or three good-sized logs, and raking the fire together, threw them on. The dry wood blazed up with a cheerful flame that almost reached the branches of the pine tree beneath which their tent was pitched, and Hugh, after filling his pipe and lighting it by means of a twig thrust into the fire, sat back and declared that this was solid comfort.

"It's a bully good camping place, isn't it?" said Jack.

"First class," was the reply, "and we are going to have good weather and good country to camp and travel in all summer, except when we have thunderstorms. Of course, we have got to expect that, for there is lots of thunder and lightning in these mountains. We will get wet once in a while, but that's no great harm."

"No, indeed," said Jack, "getting wet is a part of the play."

"Tell me, Hugh," he added after a pause, "what other fur may we expect to see here?"

"Why, son," said Hugh, "there is mighty little that will be good now, except bears. As I told you at the ranch, any bears that we can kill before the first of July will be good prime skins, but right after that they begin to get sun-burned and rusty, and begin to shed off, and then, the first thing we know, they are not worth skinning for about three months. Along in October they begin to get a pretty good coat again, though it is not so very long."

"Well," persisted Jack, "there is fur in the mountains here, I suppose."

"Lord, yes," said Hugh. "There are a few otter, lots of mink, and a few marten high up in the hills;

once in a while a wolverine, and once in a while a fisher; but none of this fur, except the otter, will be good in summer, and otters are so scarce that they are not worth bothering with."

"I should not have supposed there would be any otter here, because the streams are so small."

"There are not very many," said Hugh, "but yet more than you think. You see there are worlds of fish in many of these mountain streams, and where there are fish you are pretty sure to find otter. In some of the lakes high up in the mountains I have seen lots of otters, but as I say, there aren't enough to try to trap."

"What is the fisher, Hugh?" asked Jack. "I have heard of that animal, but I don't very well know what it is. Is that the same creature that the books speak of as the black cat?"

"I reckon it is," replied Hugh. "I have heard some trappers call them by that name. Really, it always seemed to me like a big marten, and why people called it fisher, I don't know. I never saw one near water, and I don't believe they catch fish. They are great things to climb round in the trees, and they are quicker in them than any squirrel you ever saw. I have seen them chasing martens and I believe that they eat them. I know they eat porcupines, for though I never saw one kill a porcupine, I have seen them with porcupine quills in their faces and in their forelegs, but bless you, the quills didn't seem to bother them a mite. You take a dog or a cat that had as many quills in it as I have seen in some fishers, and it would be all swelled up and not able to see out of its eyes, nor to walk; but I have seen fishers stuck full of quills and I never saw one swelled up or apparently hurt at all. They don't seem to get inflamed by the quills the way a dog or a cat does."

"I suppose, Hugh, there is no great chance of our

being able to shoot any of these animals while we are hunting?"

"No," replied Hugh, "I don't think there is. Of course, you never can tell what you might run across when you are going through the timber or up over the rocks on the mountains, but as a rule these animals will see, or hear, or smell you before you know they are around, and they'll just slip out of sight, and either get away as fast as they can, or else watch you to see what you are going to do. I remember that the only wolverine I have killed in a good many years was one that I saw traveling along over the rocks when I was up above timber-line one time waiting to try to kill a sheep. He just walked up within easy shot, and, of course, I killed him. A mighty pretty looking animal he was, too, with his smooth coat all shining in the sun and blowing in the breeze.

"But, look here, son, if you and I are going to get off in any sort of season to-morrow morning we'd better turn in now. Suppose you go down to the creek and get a bucket of water, and I'll go out and look around through the horses, and then we'll make down our beds."

"All right," said Jack, and he did as requested, and a little later the camp was peacefully sleeping, as the fire died down.

VIII

THE WATER FOWLS' SUMMER HOME

It was still dark when Jack awoke next morning, but when he struck a match and looked at his watch he saw that daylight was not far off, and rising and putting on his clothes he started to light the fire.

Hugh, having heard him, arose, and before long breakfast was well under way. Then Jack went out to where the horses were picketed and set free all but one, and this one he changed to fresh grass, so that the horses might start with full bellies. The sun had not yet risen when breakfast was over, and Jack had brought in and saddled all the horses. They made an early start, for the day's journey was to be a long one.

For the first hour or two of the march it was interesting to Jack to watch the antelope that were seen on both sides of the trail, and to see how differently those acted that had the sun on their backs from those that had the sun shining in their faces. Sometimes there were antelope on both sides of the trail, and when those that were looking away from the sun started to run, then those that were looking toward the sun started also. But if the little pack train approached antelope with the sun on its back, so that the antelope were looking toward the sun, the timid animals, unable to distinguish what these moving objects were, would let them come up very close without showing any alarm. Jack had often seen the same thing happen with other animals, so it was not new to him, but, nevertheless, it was interesting, and he spoke of it to Hugh.

"Yes," said Hugh, "that is interesting, and, of course, brings up the old question of how useful their different senses are to wild animals. Some people say that a deer has bad eyes; that he can't see well, and, of course, we all of us know that all game depends on its powers of scent for warning that its enemies are about. Most game can hear well enough, and can distinguish between the ordinary sounds of the timber or the mountains and those made by a man going through the timber or rattling the rocks. The people that say that game can't see are mistaken, I think. They don't go quite deep enough into the matter. What I believe is, that many wild animals don't notice a man and so don't take him for an enemy, if he keeps absolutely still. An animal's eye is quick to catch any motion, but a man standing still may be taken for a stump, or a rock, or a bump of earth. The deer's eye does not stop to look carefully at stumps and rocks and bumps of earth, but if one of these things moves, then the eye stops and studies it, and is likely to find out what it is."

"Of course that is so, Hugh," said Jack, "but I never thought of it before. I remember, though, that when I went duck shooting on Great South Bay with my uncle, and was sitting in the blind, he always warned me never to make a sudden motion, but that if I wanted to lower my head to get it out of sight behind the blind, I should do so with a slow, gradual motion."

"Of course," said Hugh, "but if you stop and think a minute you will know that that is just exactly what you do now when you are hunting in this country. If you raise your head up so that it shows over a ridge, and see an antelope feeding there, you don't duck down to get out of sight; you lower your head very slowly. If you made a quick motion the antelope would see you out of the corner of his eye, and would run away

without waiting to ask any questions. If you lower your head gradually, he does not see the slow motion, and you can have a chance to crawl up to him."

"That's so," assented Jack; "I must be pretty stupid not to be able to think of these things."

"Well," replied Hugh, "of course you have to think, and boys don't always stop to do that. Men, after they have lived a good many years find that they have to do it. But this is what I wanted to say about the power of game to recognize danger from man; a deer knows that there is danger only from living things, and he knows also that only living things move, so that if he sees anything make a sudden motion he knows that he must be on the lookout."

All day they traveled on through a broad valley, and toward night camped at the foot of a high, bare hog-back running north and south, one of the foot-hills or spurs of the main range to the north. There was a good spring where they camped, and quite a wide stretch of level prairie, in which were half a dozen large alkali lakes, and on these lakes were great numbers of water fowl. Some of them were so large that Jack thought they must be geese, and getting his field glasses out of the packs he looked at them and found that they really were geese.

"How is it, Hugh," he said, "that geese are found here as late in the season as this? Here it's nearly the first of June, and it seems to me all geese ought to have passed north to their breeding grounds before this."

"I'll allow," answered Hugh, "that the geese ought to be on their breeding grounds by this time, but why do you say they ought to be up north?"

"Why, said Jack, "I thought all geese went north into Canada to breed, except a few that breed in northern Montana, right close to the Canada line."

"Well," said Hugh, "there's where you are mistaken. The geese breed right here in these mountains,

and quite a way south of here, too. Then you know yourself, you've seen them breeding on the Missouri River, although that is pretty well north, of course."

"Yes," said Jack, "I've seen them up north, but I didn't suppose that any of them stayed as far south as this."

"That's a mistake," said Hugh. "In old times they used to breed on the prairies as far south as Kansas, and maybe still further south. Many a time I have seen them breeding in Nebraska and in northern Kansas, and from that away north as far as I've been. Swans, too, used to breed in the same country. The reason they don't breed there any more is because the white people have come in and killed them at all times of the year, and so they go on to a country further away from where the white people are."

"Well, live and learn," said Jack. "I got my knowledge about that from the books, but I guess the books don't know everything?"

"Well," said Hugh, "I guess the books know just as much as the men knew that wrote them, and I suppose there's a lot about this western country that they don't all know yet."

"Say, Hugh," said Jack, "after we've had supper I'm going over to these lakes to try to see what birds there are on them. Do you mind coming along?"

"No," said Hugh, "I'll go with you, but first we've got to get supper and got to get up wood enough for to-night and to-morrow morning. I'll rustle the supper if you'll pack in the wood."

"Done," said Jack; and for the next fifteen or twenty minutes he was busy dragging in aspen and cottonwood sticks of which, before very long, he had a good pile.

After supper Hugh said to Jack, "Son, to-morrow we'll have to kill something, for there's only enough meat left for a couple of meals. I don't like to eat

meat that is just fresh killed, but if to-morrow you'll kill a deer or a good fat antelope, we will carry it a day and then it will be just about right to eat."

They washed up the dishes before they started, and then walked over to the lakes, the sun being only about an hour high. The lakes were shallow, and their shores, sloping up very gradually from the water's edge, were all of soft, yellow mud, so that it was not possible to get close to the water without sinking deep in the mire.

The abundance and variety of birds seen was very striking. White gulls flew slowly over the water, and beautiful avocets, striking objects from the contrasting black and white of their plumage, waded along near the shore. Flocks of tiny shore birds tripped lightly over the soft mud of the banks, and brown and black long-billed curlews stalked over the grassy prairie. Many of these birds were evidently breeding, and displayed great anxiety when the visitors approached their nests. The curlews especially were demonstrative, and flew about close above the men's heads, uttering loud, shrill cries.

On a little knoll near one of the lakes, Hugh and Jack sat down and adjusted the glasses to study the birds that were floating on the water.

Geese and ducks of several species were there, and Jack could detect also grebes and coots, and the curious little shore birds known as phalaropes, which swam about in the water with a curious nodding motion of the head that reminded Jack of the rails.

Jack was very much excited at this display of bird life, for he realized that at this season of the year all these birds had either eggs or young, and there were a multitude of birds that he had never seen before, and whose eggs he had never seen nor even heard about.

"Why, Hugh, it seems to me we ought to stop over here a day and see if we can't collect a lot of the

eggs of these birds. I think there are some birds here whose eggs have never been described. Just think what a great thing it would be if I could take them back and show them to the ornithologists who have never seen them."

"Sure," said Hugh, "that would be great. How are you going to know when you get an egg back East what bird it belongs to?"

"Why," said Jack, "I suppose I could remember. I guess my memory is good enough for that."

"Maybe it is," said Hugh. "I know mine wouldn't be, especially if I had to do with a lot of eggs of birds that I never had seen before. I should have to tie the egg round the neck of each bird and take both home."

"Well," said Jack, "of course, if you are going to collect the eggs I suppose you ought to collect the parent birds at the same time."

"I suppose," said Hugh, "that you've got your tools for fixing up these eggs to take away with you, cached somewhere in the packs, haven't you, and some sort of a chest to carry these eggs in? I expect if we put a lash rope over them and pull pretty hard it will smash some of the eggs, won't it?"

Jack sat silent for a little while, and then looked at Hugh. "I never saw anybody that could make a fellow feel like such a fool as you can."

"Why," said Hugh, "I don't want you to feel like a fool."

"No," said Jack, "I suppose maybe that is not what you want. I suppose that you want to make me think before I speak."

"Yes," said Hugh, "that's something I would like to do. That would be a bully lesson for you to learn, and I think you are learning it, only maybe not very fast."

"Of course," said Jack, "you know just as well as I do that I haven't any stuffing tools with me, or any

tools for blowing eggs, or anything to carry bird skins and eggs in if I had them. Of course, if we were to put such things on the packs they'd get broken and smashed up in forty ways and wouldn't be worth throwing away."

"No," said Hugh, "I don't reckon they would."

"Well," sighed Jack, "it's mighty aggravating to sit here and look at all these birds and think that there must be lots of their eggs all about and I can't get hold of them."

"I'll allow that must be pretty aggravating," said Hugh; "but if you wanted to go off to collect bird skins and eggs why didn't you think of it before you started out from the States, and bring along with you the tools you wanted to use? Suppose I had started from the ranch to trap beaver, and had come down here without any traps, what would you have thought of me?"

"Well," said Jack, "I suppose I'd have thought you were a pretty queer trapper."

"I reckon so," said Hugh, "and I think you're a pretty queer bird collector, as yet. You may become a good one later, though."

It soon grew too dark to distinguish the birds, and the two returned to camp, where they built up a big fire, for the night was chilly. Several times after the fire began to blaze up, they saw an owl fly into the circle of light and pass once or twice about the fire and then out into the darkness again.

"What gets me, Hugh," said Jack, after they had settled themselves comfortably by the fire, and Hugh's pipe was going well; "what gets me, is what has become of all the animals and birds that used to inhabit all this country? Of course, when I first came out here I saw antelope and buffalo in wonderful numbers, and there are lots of them now, but there must have been a time, say a hundred or two hundred years ago, when

perhaps there was just as many buffalo and elk and deer in Illinois or Ohio as there were in Wyoming and Montana when I came West. Now, of course, all those animals have disappeared from that country, and in the same way birds have disappeared. There must be places still all over the West here where birds come and breed, just as thickly as they do on these little ponds that we've been looking at to-night. And in old times they may have bred just as thickly in the swamps of Illinois and Ohio as they do here in this valley. What's become of them all?"

Hugh did not answer, but made with his hand the sign for "gone under," meaning dead.

"Yes," Jack went on, "I suppose they are, but is that what is going to happen to all the wild animals and birds in this country? Is the whole of North America going to be swept bare of all the birds and animals that belong to it, and just have nothing in it except sheep and cattle and dogs and things? That's the way it seems to me, but I hope that's not the way it's going to be."

"Well, son, that's one of the things that we have often talked over, but it's a pretty hard thing to prophesy about. There's one thing sure, all big animals are going to be killed off, except those that are found in parks like that Yellowstone Park we came through two years ago. I expect that there, elk and deer and sheep and antelope may be found for a long time. But people are going to come into this western country, thicker and thicker, and, of course, they are not coming here for their health, they're coming here to make money. One man will start a band of cattle, another will have a bunch of sheep, another will farm along the creek; ten to one, mines will be found all over these mountains, and the first thing any of us know the country will be full of people and towns and railroads and factories. Of course, you don't need me to tell you

that there can't be any game when the country gets full of people."

"I suppose that's just what will happen, Hugh. I suppose a time will come when there won't be any more buffalo, and maybe when there won't be any elk or even deer. I'm glad that I was born in time to see something of these wild animals."

"Yes," said Hugh, "you are lucky to get to see them, because I believe that they're not going to last many more years. I wouldn't be surprised if twenty or twenty-five years saw them pretty much all wiped out. I expect that I'll be dead before that times comes, but likely you'll be alive all right."

Jack sat thoughtfully staring into the fire as though he were contemplating the death of all game, and of Hugh as well.

Presently Hugh went on: "Now, about the birds, it's a little different. They've got wings, and can fly, and do fly long distances. They don't have to stop in one place, and, of course, away up north there is a whole lot of country yet that the people haven't got into, and I expect a good many of the birds that used to breed in Illinois and Ohio, as you were saying just now, don't stop any longer in that country, but keep on going to the north.

"I've seen Hudson Bay men that came down from that northern country who say that in some of the lakes and big rivers up there the natives at the right time of the year kill a powerful lot of fowl. There must be dead loads of them there, and then when molting season comes and they lose their wing feathers and can't fly, the natives take after them in their canoes and kill them with sticks and spears, and then dry them. I believe that's a regular part of their living up there."

"There must be an awful lot of ducks and geese that breed in that great country up there, Hugh. It's

almost the whole width of the continent, is it not? and a thousand or fifteen hundred miles north and south?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "it's an awful big country, and mighty few people in it. You know, don't you," he went on, "that the food of a number of the Hudson Bay Posts, during certain seasons of the year, is dried or frozen fish, and dried or smoked geese? They kill the geese spring and fall, as they are passing back and forth, and so many of them that they store them up for the winter and summer food."

"My," said Jack, "what a place that would be to go shooting in!"

"Don't fool yourself, son. When you kill game regularly for the food it yields, it stops being fun to hunt and it becomes real work. I know it's so because I've done it."

"To-morrow morning," added Hugh, "unless I miss my guess, you'll see the biggest beaver meadow you ever saw, and we'll get to it toward night. Then beyond, and not far off, is the main range, where we can hunt if we want to, but I don't know as we'll be able to get there. Haven't you noticed something like smoke off to the west? 'Pears to me I have, and it may be that the range is on fire. If it is, that will let us out as far as hunting goes."

"I hope there isn't any fire," said Jack; "I want very much to get up into the mountains."

"Well," said Hugh, as he rose and began to take the straps off his bed and to unroll it, "even if we should not be able to get into the mountains here, we can do it further south. We'll see how the high hills look to-morrow."

In a little while the two were fast asleep, and as the fire died down no sound was heard except the calls of the water fowl from the nearby lake.

CHAPTER IX

A TROUBLESOME GRIZZLY

THEY had sat up so late the night before that neither Hugh nor Jack was astir very early next morning, and the sun was well above the horizon before they started west toward the high ridge which lay between them and the main snowy range.

The horses were now so accustomed to traveling together that they needed no driving, and Jack and Hugh rode side by side ahead of the packs, though every now and then Jack looked back to see that the animals were coming on well. Occasionally an animal would stop and lag a little, and graze alongside the trail, but usually a shout from Jack would cause it to stop feeding, and it would trot along until it had overtaken the others. Each morning about an hour after starting, when the ropes had stretched a little, the train was halted and the lashings tightened upon all the animals, and after that they needed no attention.

Of course, if a bad stream or a very steep ravine had to be crossed, Jack dropped behind and followed the pack animals, but the packing was so well done that it was very seldom they had to give any attention to the loads.

As they rode along Hugh said to Jack: "If we had a big train or heavy loads, I would go 'round the point of the hog-back, which would make us travel five or six miles further but would be a good deal easier on the horses, but our animals are fat and strong, and lightly loaded, and we may as well make the cut-off and cross the ridge."

The ascent of the hog-back was steep at first, but then became more gradual. Several times during the

climb they stopped to let the horses breathe. On the way up, several big buck antelope were seen, each one feeding alone, but as they were all at some little distance from the trail, Jack thought it better to let them alone, on the chance later of getting a shot which would require less time.

They had nearly reached tne crest of the ridge when Hugh, waving his hand toward the west, remarked, "I thought so; the range is afire," and Jack could plainly see the smoke rising some ten or fifteen miles distant. A little further on they could see the whole range, and found that everywhere to the south it was on fire, and that the fire seemed to be moving northward. Columns and masses of thick white smoke rose from the mountains in many places, and were rolling steadily along from south to north.

The fire seemed to be chiefly on the lower slopes of the mountains. Above it could be seen the green timber, and above that again gray rocks bare of vegetation, whitened a little further up by occasional patches of snow, and still higher were great fields of snow, pure and shining when touched by the rays of the sun, but seeming gray and soiled where shadowed by clouds or by a column of ascending smoke.

"No use to think of hunting there, is there, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Not any, son," replied Hugh. "We'll have to strike into the hills somewhere else. But look at that beaver meadow this side of the mountain."

Jack lowered his eyes to the valley, and was astonished at what he saw. There, spreading over miles and miles, north and south, was a great carpet of green, bordered on either side by the gray and yellow prairie, and intersected by a thousand tiny streams that glistened in the sunlight. It looked like a vast carpet of emerald velvet over which had been spread an irregular net of silver cords.

Beautiful it was, but the most astonishing thing about it all was its great size. It seemed to stretch north and south for ten or fifteen miles, and east and west for half as many. The view presented astonishing contrasts in the aspect of the mountains, snow-capped, timber-clad, and fire-swept; and not less in the lower land, with its opposites of arid sage brush prairie, and of watered, verdant meadow.

Jack turned to Hugh: "That's the most wonderful thing I've seen since I've been out West, Hugh. Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Well," said Hugh, "it's sure a pretty sight, but I wouldn't want to say that it was the prettiest thing that I'd ever seen. One sees a whole lot of fine sights out in this country. 'Pears to me I've heard you say a good many times that different things are the most wonderful things you'd ever seen."

"Well," said Jack, "that's so. I never get through wondering at the sights here in the mountains, and I don't suppose it's true that each thing is more wonderful than anything else I've ever seen, but I do keep being surprised at all these beautiful sights."

"Well," said Hugh, "what do you think of stopping off at the first water we come to, and taking off the loads and letting the horses rest while we cook a cup of coffee?"

"That will suit me, Hugh," said Jack, "but I'd like to stop somewhere so I can look at this show that is spread out in front of us."

"We can do that all right," said Hugh, "and I think over in that little ravine just below us we'll find some water. There are some willows down there, and that must mean a spring somewhere near."

They started on, Jack following behind to keep the horses up and to catch them when they got to the stopping place.

Hugh kept on down the slope, and then turning short

to the right descended into the ravine. He had got part way down the slope when suddenly his horse threw forward his ears and stopped. Two of the pack horses turned at right angles and began to climb the sides of the ravine. At the same moment, from under a cedar just ahead of Hugh, a bear sprang up and rushed down the ravine. Jack caught a glimpse of the animal, and saw Hugh throw his rifle to his shoulder and fire, but as the black horse was trying to run, Jack was not sure that the shot had told. Jack spurred his own horse up the side of the ravine where the pack horses had gone, and in a moment was high enough to see portions of the ravine down which the bear had run. He wheeled Pawnee so that he could shoot handily, and having loaded his rifle, sat there watching for the bear.

Suddenly it appeared, and he could see it while it ran twenty-five or thirty yards along the ravine. It was a hundred and fifty yards off, but he threw his rifle to his shoulder, and aiming high and well ahead of the bear, fired. The animal turned a somersault at the shot, and then regained its footing and disappeared.

Hugh, meantime, had galloped on down the ravine, and a moment of two later his rifle spoke again.

Jack was strongly tempted to ride down and see what had happened, but feeling that it was now too late to do anything, and that the bear had either been killed or had escaped, he rode round the pack horses and drove them on down the ravine, following Hugh's course. Presently he came to a place where some willows grew at the side of a patch of green grass, and there out of the bottom of the bluff bubbled a spring of clear water. Jack tasted it and found it sweet and good, and then caught up the pack horses and tied them to the willows.

A few moments later Hugh galloped back, dismounted, and said: "Well, let's take the packs off

here," and in a few moments the horses were relieved from their loads, and were turned loose on the green grass, with their hackamores dragging.

Jack saw that Hugh had blood on his hands, but forebore to ask any questions. He felt sure that presently Hugh would tell what had happened.

"Now, son," said Hugh, "we've got quite a job on our hands skinning that bear. It's a good-sized fellow, and you know that skinning a bear is a good deal of a job."

"Where is he?" said Jack.

"About a half mile down that little valley, right in the open. He's got a fine hide and we want to save it. It ought to mean eight or ten dollars to us. Suppose we go right down there and take his jacket off, and then come back and eat and pack up and go on. That's going to cut off your looking at the scenery, but we can't afford to waste that bear's hide."

"No," said Jack, "you're dead right, of course. Let's go and do it now. We can look at scenery 'most any time, but we don't get bears every day. How was he hit, Hugh?" Jack went on. "There were only three shots fired."

"I guess they all hit him," said Hugh. "My horse was hopping round so when I fired the first shot that I expected I'd miss him clean, but I don't think I did. I shot him too far back and too high up. When the ball hit him he fell and bit himself, and then got up and kept on. I started after him, but just then he disappeared round a point, and when I got up to it he was away ahead of me. Then you shot and you hit him, because he fell again and then got up and went on again, but he was hard hit then and going slowly, and before long I got up to him and killed him. The hide is in good order, and we are pretty lucky to get it."

The two mounted and rode down the valley, presently reaching the bear, which, as Hugh said, was a

big one with a beautiful long coat of shining brown. The long claws of the fore-feet showed that he was a grizzly and a very large and handsome specimen.

The next hour and a half was spent in skinning the bear, and long before this operation was finished, Hugh and Jack were tired and more or less covered with grease.

"This will be good practice, son, if we get any beaver," said Hugh. "You see, in skinning a beaver you've got to work just as you do on this bear. You can't do any stripping; every inch of hide you take off has got to be cut free from the fat that lies under it, and as you see, that's a mighty long, slow business."

"I should say it was," said Jack, "and a mighty greasy business, too. It seems to me as if I was all covered with oil, and I am, up to my elbows, and my face, too. Seems to me my face never itched before as it does now, and when I rub it with my greasy hands of course my face gets all grease, too."

"Yes," said Hugh, "it's a very different thing skinning a bear or beaver, from skinning a deer or a buffalo, but this is just a part of the game, son, and this hide will pay us good wages for the trouble we've been to."

"There," Hugh went on, as he made a last cut, "that hide is free on this side down to the middle of the back. How are you getting on on your side?"

"I've got a lot more to do," said Jack.

"All right," said Hugh, and he came around to Jack's side and began to help him, and presently it seemed as if the hide were free throughout.

"Now," said Hugh, "I tried to lift and drag that bear just after he was dead, and I couldn't stir it, and I don't believe you and I can do any better now; let's try."

They took hold of the bear's hind-legs and tried to lift and pull the carcass off the hide, but it was too heavy for them to move.

"Well," said Hugh, "get your rope off Pawnee and we'll see what a horse can do."

When Jack had brought his lariat, it was knotted about the hind-legs of the bear, and then after tightening the cinches of his saddle, Jack mounted, took a double turn of the rope around his saddle horn, and then slowly started Pawnee up the valley while Hugh took hold of the bear's hide to keep it in place. The carcass began to slide off the hide, and Hugh with his knife made two or three last cuts, which freed the hide from the carcass, and presently the hide lay there spread out flesh side up. After the rope had been untied from the carcass, the two went over the hide with their knives scraping away all the fat that they could get off, and presently Hugh declared that it was in shape to be spread and dried.

"We're likely to have some trouble getting this on a pack, because, of course, no horse likes to pack a bear hide, but I guess we can do it all right. Instead of taking it back to where we left the horses, let's spread it out here and bring one of the animals down here and load it on him."

"All right," said Jack, "and now let's get back to camp. I feel like having a wash."

Returning to the horses it took some little time with water, mud, and sand—for, of course, the soap was in the pack and they did not want to open it—to cleanse themselves of the grease from the bear. The smell of the beast they could not get rid of, and this gave them some trouble when they were catching and loading their animals, for the horses snorted and jumped and pulled back when they caught the scent of either of the two. However, at last they had their lunch, and then loaded their horses, and went down to the bear skin.

As Hugh had said, the matter of loading it was not easily performed. It was first lashed up into a secure package, to be put on as a top pack, and then the lightest loaded of the horses was brought up to it. The

horse did not like it a bit, but at length by blindfolding him with a coat tied about his head, he stood quietly enough for Hugh to place the load on his back, but Jack was obliged to hold the rope, for the horse, notwithstanding his blindfolding, kept stepping about and was very uneasy.

Hugh managed to tie the skin on so that it would stay, and then Jack, going around to the off side, helped to put on the lash rope firmly. When they took off the coat, however, and the horse saw what was on his back, he bucked fiercely all over the meadow, and would have stampeded the other horses when he passed near them if it had not been that Hugh and Jack, both mounted, had a firm hold on their ropes.

At last the horse became tired of bucking, but its fears were not quieted, for every little while it would look back at its pack and snort and rush here and there, much afraid of the load it was carrying.

"That bear skin is going to make us a lot of trouble, son," said Hugh, "and the sooner we get it dried so that some of the smell will be gone out of it, the better it will be for us. Let's go on now to the edge of that beaver meadow and camp there. We'll have to spend a day or two drying this hide and getting the horses used to it."

For the rest of the day they had much trouble with their horses, for every time the trail crooked around so that the odor of the bear skin was carried to the other horses of the train, there was a scattering, and Jack had to round up the animals and bring them back again.

It was nearly dark when they finally camped at a little spring at the border of the beaver meadow, where a little clump of cottonwood trees gave shelter and wood for the campfire.

Not long before they reached the stopping place, dark clouds had begun to rise over the mountains to

the west, and gradually the whole western sky became overcast.

"Looks like we were going to have a rain storm," said Hugh; "and I wish we might, and a good hard one. It would put out the fire on the mountains and cleanse the air of the smoke."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I wish it would rain. I hate to see all that timber burning. It will take a long time for the mountains to become green again."

"Yes," said Hugh, "many and many a year; and sometimes, of course, after the fire has gone over the hills like that they never again are covered with timber. I have seen mountains way down in the southwest that at one time must have been covered with splendid great trees, and then had been burned over and no trees ever grew there again. There are big logs lying on the hillside now that are all that is left of those old forests, but no sign of any new timber springing up anywhere."

"Well, how long ago were those mountains burned over?" asked Jack.

"You can't prove it by me," said Hugh. "I've asked that question a good many times, and I have never found anybody that was old enough to know anything about when the fires took place. It must have been long, long ago."

"But why don't those old logs that you were speaking about, rot and disappear?" asked Jack.

"I'll tell you why," said Hugh. "It's because that country is so dry. I don't believe more than six inches of rain falls there in the year, and nothing ever rots; things just dry up and lie there, getting drier and drier all the time."

"And yet," said Jack, "when we came down through the mountains from the north, we saw lots of country that had been burned, and almost everywhere a lot of new green timber was springing up to take the

place of the old burnt tree trunks that were getting ready to fall."

"That's so," replied Hugh; "but I remember that we passed over some places where the forests had been burned, where there was no sign at all of anything growing, no sign of any soil; nothing except the bare gravel or the rock."

"Yes," said Jack, "I remember that, too."

"I reckon it's like this," explained Hugh. "If the fire passes over the country quickly and just burns or kills the standing trees and doesn't heat the soil too much, then the seeds that have been dropped by the trees and are lying hidden in the soil, sprout and new timber grows up, but if the fire catches in the soil of the forest, which you know is made up of the needles and branches and cones of the pine trees, and if that soil is dry enough so that it will burn, then the fire keeps creeping through it, burning it where it's dry enough to burn, or heating it where it's too damp, and so all the seeds that are lying in it are either burned or cooked, and there is nothing left to sprout. Then after that, a few years of rain storms will wash away all the soil, and as there's nothing left on the mountain to furnish seeds, no timber ever grows. I take it, a great deal depends on the condition of the soil at the time the fire goes through. If it's dry, the seeds of the trees are likely to be killed. If it's damp, they're likely to live after the fire has passed and to send up another crop of trees."

"It seems an awful shame," Hugh, "that all this timber should be destroyed and all game should be driven out. Of course, the timber has no commercial value now. I suppose it's too far from any market, and there's no way to get it out."

"No," said Hugh, "you couldn't sell it for anything, of course, but the time will come, I expect, when there'll be some use for all this timber. This country

is going to fill up with people sometime, and those people will need houselogs, corral poles, and fence-posts; and then besides that, nobody knows what mines may not be found in these mountains; and if mines ever are found and worked, there is going to be a lot of lumber needed to timber them with."

When the camp was reached the western sky looked very threatening, and Hugh said to Jack, "Now, son, let us get these loads off as quick as we can and picket the horses, and then we'll get the tent up. I reckon we are going to be rained on to-night, and we may as well sleep as dry as we can."

It took but a few minutes to throw the loads off the horses, and to picket them, and immediately the little tent was raised and the beds and packs got under cover. By this time it was dark, and over the mountain-tops to the west could be seen lightning flashes, playing far above the red glow of the forest fire.

"Yes," said Hugh, as he looked toward the mountains, "I believe that rain will come pretty near putting that fire out to-night. At all events it will check it."

The storm advanced toward them, and presently the light of the fire grew dimmer as the rain passed over it and advanced toward the valley. Supper had hardly been cooked when the first few drops reached them, and after piling plenty of wood on the fire, they retreated to the tent to eat. It was a hard thunder storm, and before long flashes of lightning were thick all over the sky and the thunder was crashing and rattling above their heads.

"I don't believe we'll get drowned out here to-night," said Hugh, "for this place where we've camped is a few inches higher than anything round about it, but we may find our things pretty damp in the morning, for this hard rain sifts through even good canvas like this," and he pointed to the tent above them.

"There's one thing you want to look out for when

you are camping in a dry country, son," he went on; "don't ever camp down in a ravine, no matter how dry it may seem to be. I've known three or four cases where a lot of fellows camped in a nice grassy spot in the middle of a ravine and along during the night there came a cloud-burst somewhere up on the high prairie, and the water came rolling down the ravine and floated all the fellows off. I guided a party of scientific chaps one time that did just that. The ravine was dry when they went to sleep, and they were washed away during the night, and the next morning the ravine was pretty nearly dry again, but they spent two or three days traveling down that gulch, picking up their things that had been carried away by the water and digging them out of the mud and sand. Some of the men might easily enough have got drowned if the storm had lasted a little longer."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "why did you not tell them not to camp in such a place."

"I did," said Hugh, "but they laughed at me, and thought that because there wasn't any water there then, and hadn't been for a long time, there never would be any. I took my blankets and slept on a little point eight or ten feet above the bottom of the ravine and the water never got to me, but I had to laugh at two or three of the young fellows who waded out close to my bed. Of course, it was dark and they didn't know where they were, nor what had happened. I heard them calling and shouting to each other, and before that I had heard the water coming, so that I knew what was taking place, but I could not do anything to help any of them."

"Well, after that, Hugh, I expect those men had more respect for your advice, didn't they?" said Jack.

"Well," said Hugh, "I don't know but they did."

CHAPTER X

A BIG BEAVER MEADOW

THE next morning dawned bright and clear. Jack and Hugh were both up before sunrise, and while Hugh was kindling the fire, trying to make wet wood burn, Jack went down to the stream to get a bucket of water. He was just about to stoop over to fill his bucket, when suddenly he saw something swimming along under the water, and placing his bucket on the ground, he fired at the object just as it passed in front of him. The stream was narrow and deep, so that he shot almost directly down into the water, and as soon as the splash made by the ball ceased, he could see something struggling below him, and reaching down into the water he caught the animal by a foot, and lifting it out threw it on the bank. It was a little beaver.

Jack had seen plenty of beaver hides, but never before a living beaver, and this seemed to him very small, and, judging by what Hugh had previously told him, he concluded that it was a young one. It would not weigh more than ten or twelve pounds.

Filling his bucket, he carried his water in one hand and the beaver in the other, with the rifle under his arm, up to the tent, and surprised Hugh by throwing the beaver on the ground.

"Well," said Hugh, "is that what you shot at? I wondered whether you could have run on a deer down by the creek, or maybe an antelope. This is a good piece of meat you've brought in. Beaver is first-class eating, and this is a nice, fat, tender kitten. About three months old, I should say, by the size, and it's mighty early for kittens as big as this. You'll get

your first lesson in skinning a beaver to-day, and your first taste of beaver meat, too. Won't it be, or did you ever eat beaver when you were with the Blackfeet?"

"No, Hugh," said Jack, "I don't think I ever tasted it. I'd like to."

"We'll have beaver tail soup, too," said Hugh. "This tail's only a little one, but it'll be enough to give us a taste. Beaver tail used to be considered great meat by the old-time trappers, something like back fat among the Indians. I never cared much about beaver tail. It's too oily for my taste. I should think those Indians we saw last summer up in British Columbia would like it, but I like something a little more solid.

"Lay that kitten in the shade," he went on, "and after we've got through our breakfast we'll stretch that bear hide. You must remember that that is like so much cash in our pocket. We've got to save all the fur we get this trip, and no fur is ever safe until it's good and dry."

As they sat at breakfast, they looked toward the mountains. The morning was still, and instead of the flames and the onrushing clouds of smoke which they had seen the day before, there were now only a few smoke wreaths lazily curling up toward the sky at occasional points on the mountain side.

"Yes," said Hugh, as he waved his knife toward the range, "I reckon that storm last night put out that fire. In the first place it wet all the timber, green and dry, and then it wet all the dead underbrush and the needles and dry branches with which the ground is covered. I think everything got a good soaking, and I believe that now the fire will go out. Anyway, I hope so."

"I suppose you have no more idea than I have how the fire got started?" asked Jack.

"No," said Hugh, "no man can tell about that. A fire may get started in forty ways. Usually, it's some

fellow goes off and leaves his campfire burning, and then a puff of wind comes up and blows some of the coals into some dry grass or something that catches fire easy, or else the Indians may set fire to the timber just for the purpose of driving the game into some big stretch of country where it is easy to hunt it. Of course, Indians get the credit for a whole lot of fires that they never set, and I believe that half the fires are started by white men, just from carelessness, like throwing down a lighted match, or chucking away a cigarette that will burn for ten or fifteen minutes. On the prairie, of course, lots of fires are started by the railroad. The sparks from the locomotive fall among dry grass. Sometimes in the timber lightning starts a fire. There are lots of ways in which the forests can be burned, and as long as there's so much forest, and it's nobody's business to look after it, of course, these fires will keep burning year after year."

"Well now, son," said Hugh, "after they had finished eating, if you'll get another bucket of water I'll wash the dishes, and then we can stretch that bear hide."

Jack brought another bucket of water, which Hugh set on the fire, and while it was heating he directed Jack to unlash the bear hide and to drag it out a little away from camp. After this had been done, he sent him down to look along the stream to see if he could find any birch or alder brush, telling him if he could do so to get enough branches to make thirty or forty wooden pins. Taking the ax, Jack went down the stream and could find neither birch nor alder. He did find, however, a thicket of small ash saplings, and cutting down half a dozen of these he put them on his back and dragged them back to camp.

"Couldn't find any birch?" said Hugh. "Well, I don't know as I'm much surprised. It's pretty well south for birch, but that makes better pins than 'most

anything else. However, this ash will have to do, I reckon." He took the saplings and with the ax cut them into lengths of about eight or ten inches, and then taking the thickest ones he split them.

Then he said to Jack: "Get out your knife now, son, and help me whittle pegs. We want quite a lot of them, for I would like to stretch this hide nicely, and take it in in good shape."

For half or three-quarters of an hour the two were busily employed whittling down and pointing pins, and they had a large pile of them before Hugh declared that there were enough. They carried the pins over to where the bear skin lay and threw them on the ground; then turning the hide flesh side up they stretched it as nearly square as possible, and then with their jack-knives went round its border, cutting holes half an inch long in the margin of the hide at intervals of about six inches. When these had all been cut, the hide was again spread out, and Hugh, with the ax, drove two pins through holes, one in each side of the neck, and then, stretching the hide to its full length, drove two more in holes each about a foot on either side of the tail. Then two pins were driven at one side of the hide between fore and hind leg, and two on the other side, between fore and hind leg. The hide now was held in position, and going about it, Hugh, with great care, drove in his pins, stretching the hide so that it was nearly square, though a little longer from head to tail than from side to side. Of course, the four legs and the head made the square irregular, but, on the whole, Hugh declared, after he had finished, that it was a very good job.

"I shouldn't have stretched this hide quite so large, son," he said, "if it hadn't been so very well furred. Usually the hair is thin on the flanks, and if you stretch a hide much you get places on either flank just in front of the hind-legs where there is scarcely

any hair at all, and a bear hide that shows up like that never brings a good price. You notice, though, that on this hide the fur is just about as good on the belly as it is on the back. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if your uncle bought this hide himself, instead of letting us sell it to some fur buyer.

"Now, I don't want the sun to burn it," he went on, "so we'll just go down to the creek and get a lot of willow brush and make a shade for it. If the sun shines all day on this fat it will more than half cook it, and that will spoil the hide."

Hugh and Jack went down to the stream, and cutting a lot of the green-leafed willows, brought them up and so arranged them that the direct rays of the sun were kept from the hide.

"Never dry a hide in the sun," said Hugh; "always in the shade. Let the wind and the dryness in the air take up the moisture for you. Then your hides will always sell well."

"Well, son," said Hugh, when the job of stretching the hide and shading it was ended, "do you feel pretty wolfish?"

"Yes," said Jack, "I believe I'm ready for dinner."

"All right," said Hugh, "we'll skin that little beaver, and roast him for our dinner. If we have any luck trapping you'll have plenty of skinning to do before we get back, and I guess you'll be pretty sick of it."

Returning to the camp they took the beaver kitten to the shade of one of the cottonwood trees, and Hugh showed Jack how to skin it.

"You split it," said Hugh, "from the chin right straight down the middle of the belly to the root of the tail, and then take off the skin just as you would with any other animal. You must have a whetstone by you and keep your knife sharp, and be careful in your cutting so that you make no holes in the hide.

At the same time you must skin close to the hide, and not leave any fat on it. When you get to the legs, cut the skin all around just above the feet on fore and hind legs, and at the tail cut all around the bone, just above where the scales begin. In skinning around the eyes, see that you don't cut the eyelids, and when you get to the ears, cut them off close to the hide on the inside. Now, go ahead and see what you can do."

Jack split the beaver as directed, and carefully worked back the hide, first on one side and then on the other. It was slow business. In his effort not to cut holes in the skin he made short cuts, and the peeling off of the hide seemed to go very slowly. However, he worked it along with much patience until he got to the legs and the tail, and cut them around, as Hugh had instructed.

Meantime, Hugh had gone off and cut some long willow sprouts, and returning to where Jack sat, occupied himself in making a circular hoop, which, he told Jack, was to stretch the skin on. He bent a long twig into a circle, and with the slender branches on the end tied the smaller and larger ends together. By this time Jack had the beaver about half skinned, and Hugh, drawing his knife, took hold of one side of the hide and helped, and in a very few minutes the carcass was free and lying on the grass, while beside it lay the skin, flesh side up.

"Well, son," said Hugh, "that is a pretty good job, considering it's the first beaver you ever skinned. It will be a good practice for you. You see, if we should ever be lucky enough to get half a dozen beaver in a morning it will take us about all day long to skin them."

"Whew!" said Jack, as he stood up and stretched his cramped limbs, "that's something like work. I guess most fellows, when they think of trapping, think only of how good they feel when they catch

their beaver, and how good they feel when they sell the skins. They don't remember how much work it takes to get the skins ready for market."

"That's so, son," said Hugh, "but then, I guess that's true about 'most everything in life. The miner thinks only about the rich haul that he is going to make; he doesn't reckon on the number of hours that he's got to swing a pick or a sledge or hold a drill before he strikes pay streak. He just thinks of striking it rich, and then getting the money for his mine. There's lots of human nature in all of us.

"Well, now," he went on, "the first thing we want to do is to go down to the creek and get rid of some of this grease that we have accumulated, and then we can come back and cook our dinner."

It took a lot of scrubbing with soap and sand to free themselves from the oil of the bear and the beaver, and the smell of the grease they could not get rid of. When they had returned to the tent Hugh sent Jack to cut a long, green, forked stick. Sharpening this at its larger end, he drove it firmly into the ground in such a position that it would overhang the fire. He tied a stout cord to the hind-legs of the little beaver, built up his fire of dry cottonwood, and let it burn down to good, red coals, and then hung the beaver to the fork of a green stick so that it swung directly over the coals. Then he told Jack to get a long, green, willow twig, and from time to time to give the beaver's carcass a twirl, so that it would constantly keep turning over the fire. Then Hugh himself began preparations for the rest of the dinner, which, after all, consisted only of bread and coffee. The hot coals soon caused the grease to drip from the meat, which slowly twirled over the fire, and by the time Hugh had baked his bread and cooked his coffee he declared that the meat ought to be done. It was taken from the fire and a slash with a knife showed

that it was cooked through. Hugh divided it into two pieces, and putting it on two tin plates, gave one to Jack and took one himself.

"Now, son," he said, "try this meat, and see how you like it. Most of us think that kitten is pretty good food. Of course, it isn't like fat cow, or even like mountain sheep or elk, but to my mind it's quite as good as any bird or fish that there is."

For some time Jack's mouth was so full that he could not comment on the dinner, but, after a time, he declared in response to a question by Hugh, that the meat was "prime." "But what is this queer, half-bitter taste that it has, Hugh?" he asked.

"Why, son, that's extract of cottonwood and willow bark. Don't you know that is what the beaver feed on, and, of course, the flesh tastes of it? This little fellow is not very strong, but I've sometimes eaten old beaver that was so bitter that you really didn't want to eat much of it."

"Well," said Jack, "this is about the tenderest meat that I've ever eaten, and I like the bitter flavor."

"Yes," said Hugh, "it's mighty nice, and then this fellow is so young that you don't have to mind the ribs at all; you can chew them right up and swallow them down."

"Well," said Jack, "I say it's prime, and I hope we'll have lots more beaver meat before we go in."

"No doubt we will," said Hugh; "but no doubt, also, it will not be as good as this has been. It's not every day that one gets a kitten beaver, and it's mighty poor policy to kill them. You see this little bit of a hide isn't worth anything, whereas, if the kitten had been allowed to grow a year more the hide would have been worth, maybe, four or five dollars. Now it isn't worth more than seventy-five cents."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "if I had known that perhaps I wouldn't have shot it, but you see, I didn't

know that kitten ought not to be killed, and if I had known about it I had no time to think."

"No," said Hugh; "it was all right to kill this one, but I'm just telling you so that after this you'll know about kittens. We try always to set our traps so as to catch only the old beaver. Of course, Indians will sometimes tear down a dam and kill all the beaver in a pond, but then Indians haven't much idea of looking out for the future. I say, kill what old beaver you can and leave the young ones to grow up. If you don't get them next year somebody else will, and we'll hope that whoever does will have sense enough to spare the young ones."

When dinner was over and the dishes washed, Hugh told Jack to bring him the little beaver's hide and the willow hoop that he had made, and then after cutting holes all around the margin of the hide, he took a string and passed it through one of the holes, around the hoop, through another hole and around the hoop again, and so went all around the skin until it was fairly and evenly stretched on the willow hoop.

"There, son," he said to Jack, "that is the way to stretch a beaver hide. Now hang this up somewhere in the brush where the sun can't get at it, nor the wolves and coyotes, either, and by to-morrow morning it will be dry enough so that we can fold it and put it in the pack."

Jack soon found a good place in the shade near the tent and hung the skin up, well out of the reach of any animals that might be prowling about.

When he had returned to the tent, Hugh had about finished washing the dishes, and Jack wiped them and they were put away in a corner of the tent.

"Hugh," said Jack, "you told me to hang the beaver skin where the animals could not get at it, but what about that bear skin out there? May not some of the animals trouble that to-night?"

"Not so, son; the smell of the bear skin ought rather to frighten off the animals. At the same time I haven't very much confidence in the miserable coyotes that this country seems to be full of, so I am going to put a scare out around that hide to-night, and to-morrow morning you will see that nothing has disturbed it."

"Well, I shall be mighty glad to see what you do to it, Hugh," said Jack.

"Oh," said Hugh, "there is nothing special about it. I'm going to protect that hide by taking advantage of the cunning of the coyote. He is always on the lookout for traps and snares of one kind or another, and he won't go close to where he thinks there is a trap. Now, if I put four sticks in the ground at the corner of that bear skin, and run a little string from the tops of these four sticks all around the hide, the coyotes will not pass under that string, because they'll think that maybe it's some kind of a trap to catch them. You see, the coyotes are like some men you have heard of; sometimes they are a little too smart."

When Hugh had finished his pipe Jack said, "What shall we do this afternoon, Hugh? You were going to visit this beaver meadow this morning if we hadn't had that bear skin to attend to. Is there time enough for us to go down there now?"

"Plenty of time," said Hugh. "I was just going to propose it. There's an awful big stretch of beaver work here and I guess that a great deal of it has been abandoned. We want to find out where the beaver are now, and when we've learned that and something about their ways, we can get out our traps. If you like, I'll go down with you now and look for ponds that have beaver in them."

"All right," said Jack; "I'm ready."

"Well," said Hugh, "let's go on now, and I reckon

this is as good a time as any to christen those rubber boots that we bought in Laramie. We are likely to find it pretty wet down there, and I don't care to take a horse in those thick willows until I find out a little about them myself. An old beaver meadow is a mighty mean place to take horses. There are bogs and beaver sloughs and old abandoned beaver holes, and it's easy for a horse to fall down, and sometimes mighty hard to get him up again."

Hugh and Jack donned their rubber boots, and taking their rifles, started down toward the main stream. The meadow here was miles in width and it was quite uncertain how far they could go. As well as they could see, much of the meadow was overgrown with tall willows, but on the other hand, there seemed to be many open, grassy meadows.

Before plunging into the willows they followed along the edge for some little distance and at last Hugh said, "Let's turn in here, son, there seems to be a game trail running in the direction we should go." Sure enough, they found a well-traveled and dry game trail which showed that last autumn it had been traveled by bands of elk, for the bark was rubbed off the willows as high as Hugh's head, where great horns of the bulls had forced the stems of the brush apart on either side of the trail. The way led just in the direction they wanted to go, that is, across the valley, and ten or fifteen minutes' brisk tramping brought them to the edge of a green, grassy meadow of considerable extent. Just as they reached the edge of the willows Hugh paused and motioned with his hand, beckoning Jack to come up to his side. "Look there, son," he said, pointing, and Jack saw, only about forty yards away, two bob-cats pulling and tearing at some small thing on the ground, a little distance out in the meadow. Hugh said, "You try to kill the one that is nearest to the brush, and I'll see if I can take

the other one on the jump." Jack leveled his rifle and took a careful side aim at the breast of one of the cats, which stood facing him. On the crack of the gun the one he had fired at fell over, while the other jumped high in the air, and when it struck the ground again stood looking to see whence the noise had come. It looked only for an instant, for then Hugh's gun also spoke, and the animal fell over.

"Well," said Hugh, as he reloaded his gun, "I wouldn't have looked for those two bob-cats in such a place as this. I reckon their hides are not worth much, but they might make you a pair of shaps, son; let's go over and get them and see what it is that they were eating."

Walking over to the place, they found that the bob-cats had been devouring the carcass of a little spotted fawn.

"Look there, now," said Hugh; "that's the sort of work these fellows are at day in and day out all the year round. Of course, after a while the fawns get too big and shy for them to tackle, but these bob-cats are all the time killing something that ought to be allowed to live. I suppose that every two or three days for the next month or two each of these cats will kill a young deer, or a young antelope, or maybe a young elk. That would make twenty head of young game animals to a cat each summer. It's mighty lucky that there ain't any more of those fellows in the mountains than there is." He stooped over and looked at the head of the lynx he had shot, and then at the one that had fallen to Jack's gun. The latter was shot through the neck and showed a small hole where the bullet went in and a large one where it came out. The lynx he had killed had only one bullet hole in its neck, the ball having entered its mouth and having knocked out some of its front teeth.

"You ought to shoot closer, son," he said to Jack.

"Every hole cut in a skin takes a little off its value. You might remember this."

"Yes, Hugh, I know I ought to have shot it through the head, but the range was short and I was a little afraid that if I fired at its head I might overshoot."

"Well," said Hugh, "of course, you might have done so, and at the same time you ought to know how to hold your gun so that you would know just where the bullet would hit at every range from twenty yards up to two hundred."

"Well," said Jack, "I have been pretty lucky with my shooting, but you know that I can't shoot like you, Hugh; and I don't believe I ever will be able to."

"Nonsense," said Hugh. "When you once know your gun thoroughly, provided it's a good one, you can shoot just where you want to, and just as well as any man alive."

"Well," said Jack, "I'll try to be more careful after this. Lord knows, I want to be a good shot, but you can never make me believe that I'll ever learn to shoot as well as you do, Hugh."

"Yes, you will," said Hugh. "Now, let's see what we can do with these bob-cats, son, and then go on a little further and find out something about how these beaver down here are living."

Hugh took from his pocket a buckskin string and tied the two cats together. Jack climbed up among some stout willow stems and by his weight bent them down to within five or six feet of the ground, and then Hugh hung the cats across them. When Jack came down the stems rose nearly to their former height and left the lynxes suspended well out of reach of any prowling animal. Then the two went on.

As they walked on over the meadow where the thick grass stood knee-high, the ground became more and more moist, until presently the water quite covered the soil.

"We must look out here, son," said Hugh; "we may strike bad places anywhere and must go carefully."

Presently they were stopped by a ditch two or three feet wide, in which a few inches of water seemed to stand. Hugh stepped across it, finding the bank on the other side firm enough, and Jack jumped after him.

"This," said Hugh, "is one of those ditches that I was telling you about that the beaver dig to float their feed down to their ponds. If we could follow it back to the brush we would find that the willows all along it had been cut off."

A little beyond this they came to a place where the water was deeper and where the mud under the water was soft, and here they stopped and turning up the stream, followed as nearly as they could the edge of the old pond. Standing in the grass, out where the water was deeper, Hugh pointed out a number of little mounds overgrown with grass and low willows, which he told Jack were old and long-deserted beaver houses. "If we could get out to them," he said, "we should find under that brush a solid foundation of sticks and mud. Those houses will last for a long time, for as the sticks are kept wet all the time they don't rot, but just become water-soaked and will last pretty nearly forever."

The grass, the mud and water, and the frequent detours they had to make made their progress up stream slow, but at length they came to a grass-grown wall a foot or two higher than the rest of the ground, and when he saw that, Hugh gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Now," he said, "I think we'll have better going. This, you see, is an old dam, and the chances are we can get on it and cross the stream, and on the other side, where the bottom is narrower, we shall have better going." It turned out just as he had said. The dam, though soft in places, was generally so firm

that they could walk along on it pretty comfortably. Over toward its further end it was partly broken down and the water of the stream trickled over and through it for a width of about twenty feet, but by carefully feeling their way and at every step testing the dam with their feet, they managed to cross the running water, and from there to the other side of the valley the dam was firm.

On this west side of the stream the moist bottom was much narrower and they presently found themselves on firm ground, and started to walk briskly up the creek.

"All this work here," said Hugh, "is very old, and I haven't seen any sign of beaver being here for a long time. We'll go up stream as far as we can, but we must cross to the other side before it gets night. We'd be pretty badly off if we were caught in this beaver swamp after dark. We'd sure have to spend the night here. I wouldn't be much surprised if we found that we had to move camp and go up further toward the head of the stream. The beaver have certainly left this part of it."

They hurried on, and for a mile or two nothing was said. The sun was hot and the rubber boots which both wore seemed clumsy and heavy. Jack felt pretty tired but he said nothing of this to Hugh. Presently, from the dry upland where they were walking they could see ahead of them a pond, and then, a little later, the dam which held back its waters.

"There," said Hugh, "that looks to me like fresh work. Don't you see there in that dam some green leaves sticking up? That looks as if the dam had been lately mended; so lately that the twigs and brush used in repairing it have not yet died and lost their leaves."

Jack could see this, and then as he looked over the pond he saw a long wake in the water close to the bank, and caught Hugh's arm and said, "Look there,

Hugh, away over there under the bank. What is that swimming? Of course, it may be a duck, but may it not be a beaver?"

Hugh looked carefully, and presently the object which was swimming passed a little bay so that it was distinctly seen as a small, round object. "That's a beaver, son," said Hugh. "You can see for yourself that it isn't a duck, and the only other thing it could be would be an otter or muskrat. It is too big for a muskrat and it doesn't seem like an otter. There are beaver down there, and what's more, they haven't been disturbed for a long time, or else they wouldn't be out swimming around like that in the heat of the day. Let's go down and take a look around; but keep quiet; don't make any quick motions, and whatever you see, don't fire your gun. If there are any beaver there we want to get some of them."

The two walked slowly down toward the dam, taking advantage of whatever little cover there was in the way of inequalities of the ground or of willow brush. Down close to the water's edge grew a good many willows, and they were thus able to get quite close to the dam, and sitting down there they watched the water. For a long time, as it seemed to Jack, it was absolutely still, and then, while he was staring as hard as he could at the farther bank and the place where the dam met it, Hugh touched him and made a little motion with his head, and Jack, following the direction of his companion's eyes, saw, not more than twenty-five yards off, two beaver swimming down toward the dam, each with his head slightly turned to one side, and each dragging after him a green stick about three or four feet long. The two animals came on down to the dam, and without the slightest suspicion that they were being watched, crawled out of the water, dragging their sticks after them. When they left the water they were so close to the watchers

that they were hidden from them by the dam, and just what they were doing could not be seen. Jack touched Hugh, and when he bent down his head, whispered to him, "Couldn't we crawl up a little closer and watch them?" Hugh shook his head. A few moments later the two beaver entered the water again and swam off up the pond. When they had disappeared Hugh touched Jack, and turning about, they crept away among the willows in the direction from which they had just come.

When they had left the dam some way behind them, Hugh stopped and said to Jack, "Now, let us go on up this pond, and try to see where these beaver are living and where they're working. Keep out of sight as much as you can. I don't want them to know that there are any people about. It looks to me as if nobody had been trapping here for years, and as if we had struck something good. Now, come on, I want to walk fast and find out all I can to-night, and then we've got to get back to the camp as quickly as we can." They hurried along up the stream, Hugh looking carefully at the willows and aspens along the border of the meadow, and sometimes going down toward the edge of the pond. They crossed a number of places where branches, some of them quite large, had been dragged over the ground, but Hugh contented himself with saying to Jack, "You see, these beaver are working all along here, and they have to go quite a little way for their food."

The beaver pond was quite a long one, but at last they reached its head. Here they came upon a game trail which seemed to lead back across the stream, and turned into it in the hope that it might lead them to the other side. From one high point above the pond they got a good view of its whole length, and Hugh pointed out half a dozen grayish brown objects raised two or three feet above the water's surface, which he

told Jack were beaver houses. "It may be, son," he said, "that we'll have to bring our outfit across and camp up at the head of this pond. It's too far from our present camp for us to trap here conveniently."

The game trail led them across the wide stream valley by a good, hard road. At only one point was it deep and muddy, and just here by good luck they found an old cottonwood tree, felled long ago by the beavers, which bridged the bad place.

Once on the other side of the valley, they turned sharply down stream, and after a long walk reached the game trail by which they had crossed it earlier in the day. They went down this until they came to the place where the lynxes had been hung up, and getting these, they went back to camp, reaching it just about sundown.

"Well," said Hugh, "I feel as if we'd had quite a walk. I guess you are ready for supper, aren't you, son?"

"You bet I am," said Jack; "but the first thing I want to do is to shed these rubber boots. They seem to me the heaviest things I ever had on my feet, and I believe I've got three or four blisters from walking in them. I'd rather go barefoot than wear these again."

"Don't you believe it, son," said Hugh. "You'll be mighty glad of them boots before many days, now. I expect before long to have you wallowing around in the mud and water like a terrapin."

XI

INDIAN BEAVER LORE

THE two ate their supper that night with the eagerness of hungry and tired men. Jack thought that the term "wolfish," that Hugh sometimes used to express hunger, had a good deal of meaning. He was so greedy over his food that when the first helping was put on his plate he began to bolt it, as he said to Hugh, "like a hungry dog."

"Better eat slowly," said Hugh. "You'll get a good deal more comfort out of your food and it will do you a whole lot more good. As a rule the hungrier you are the slower you ought to eat. I've seen a number of starving people in my time, and the longer they'd been without food the less we gave them at a time. It makes a man pretty mad, though, when he is just ravenous, if he can't pitch right into his grub and eat all he wants."

"Yes," said Jack, "I've always heard that people that had been without food or without water for a long time ought to have their food or their water given them a very little at a time."

"That is so," said Hugh. "If a man takes all he wants to it's pretty sure to make him sick. I remember one time when I made quite a ride one day in about eleven hours, about seventy-five miles we called it. There was a Pawnee Indian that ran alongside of my horse the whole way. In other words, for eleven hours he ran about seven miles an hour. Sometimes he slowed down and got a mile or two behind, and then he'd run harder and catch up to me and keep right alongside the loping horse for hours. When we got to the Republican River I was good and tired. I

wouldn't let my horse drink at first, and just wetted my head without drinking, but that Indian sat down on the bank and borrowed my quart cup and drank it seven times full while he was sitting there, and then he was sick---Lord! how sick he was. When my horse had cooled off I let him drink, and then we crossed the river and camped on the other side."

"Well, why did you make that long ride?" asked Jack.

"Well," said Hugh, "we had gone down from the old Pawnee agency to take back south some horses that had been stolen, and when we were coming back we passed through some white settlements, and the white men being new to the country, and not knowing anything about Indians, wanted to kill my people and arrest me. I had all I could do to get the bunch through without anybody getting hurt, and to keep out of trouble myself, but I finally did it, and when we got out of the settlement I told the Indians that we'd all better make for home, and that we'd better separate in doing it. This Indian, Sun Chief, and I came along together. They all got in finally without any more trouble."

"When was that, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Why," said Hugh, "that was in '67 or '68, I think. It was just after the railroad had passed through Eastern Nebraska."

By this time supper was over and the dishes washed, and though Hugh and Jack were tired it hardly seemed time to go to bed.

"I wish, Hugh," said Jack, "that you would tell me something about what we saw to-day, and something more about the way the beavers live."

"Sure, said Hugh; "I'll tell you all I know, but that is not much yet, as far as what we saw to-day goes. We found a dam and some houses, where, I am sure, there are quite a number of beaver, maybe

twenty-five or thirty, and maybe more, and from what we saw, I am pretty sure that they are gentle and unsuspicious. We ought to be able to get some of them, but until we've looked about more I can't tell much. What I think we'd better do is spend a day or two more prospecting, especially on this side of the creek, and then we'll move camp according to what we see, and then go to work to set some traps. You saw enough to-day to get some idea of how the beaver live. You saw an old dam and a new one, and you saw some houses. Did you ever see a muskrat house back East?"

"Yes," said Jack, "I've seen a good many."

"Did you ever see one opened?" asked Hugh.

"No, I never did," said Jack.

"Well, now, a muskrat and a beaver are pretty close relations, I take it. They live in much the same way, and build houses that are a good deal alike. Of course, a muskrat doesn't build dams, and a muskrat's tail is flattened from side to side, while the beaver's tail is flattened from above downward, but in many ways they are a good deal alike. They both live in their houses during the winter, and if they're driven from their houses they swim under the water to some place where there's an air-hole in the ice and where they can put up their noses to breathe. Of course, both beaver and muskrat must have air. A muskrat builds his house by heaping up mud and reeds and grass in a shallow pond at a distance from the bank. The beaver builds his by heaping up the same sort of stuff, only bigger, that is to say, sticks and brush and mud in a shallow pond away from the bank. Each sort of house has in it one or more rooms with a kind of a bench all round the walls where the animals sit or sleep, and with a hole somewhere near the middle of the floor leading down through the bottom of the house and out into the open water. I have seen beaver

houses opened. Generally, they have only one big room, but sometimes a big house will have two or three rooms in it, and each room has a separate passage out into the water. I think that perhaps several families take part in building such a big house as that, and each family has its separate home.

"Beaver, you know, don't always live in houses. There's a kind that people call bank beaver, and they just dig a hole in the bank under water, which slopes up a little and finally gets above the level of the water, and there they dig out quite a good-sized room not so very far under ground. These bank beaver live for the most part in rivers or in natural lakes, and as a rule they don't build any dams. They are just like any other beaver, but I expect they live in the way that is handiest to them."

"Yes," said Jack; "'adapt themselves to their environment,' as Uncle George says."

"Yes, I reckon that's it," replied Hugh. "But those words are a trifle too long for me to understand. Now," Hugh went on, "this room that the bank beaver lives in is quite a big one, maybe four feet or so across, with a sort of bench or shelf all round it, where the beaver sit and sleep, and, of course, with the water in the middle, where the tunnel that they have dug comes up into the room. Usually there's a growth of willows or other brush on the ground above it, and quite a thickness of earth, so that there's no danger of any animal that walks around on the ground putting his foot through into the room. Of course, these holes are usually dug so that the mouths of them are always under water and so that the water always stands as near as possible at the same level, but if a big flood comes along, these bank beavers sometimes get drowned out, and have to leave their homes and sit around on the bank and in the brush waiting for the water to go down. I remember once, quite a number of years

ago, making a big killing of beaver at a time like that."

"Where was that, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"I'd been hunting through the winter," said Hugh, "supplying meat to some of the forts along the Missouri River near where Bismarck is now; Fort Stephenson, Fort Lincoln, and sometimes Fort Rice. I would kill my meat and then pack it in to the posts. Game was plenty at the heads of all the streams running into the Missouri, and it was no trick at all to get what meat I wanted. There were no buffalo, but plenty of elk, deer, and antelope. I was pretty lucky about my hunting and got meat when the Indians couldn't, and two or three times that winter I came pretty near having a row with them. They had a notion that I had some sort of medicine that brought the game to me and kept it away from them, and some of the village Gros Ventres said they were going to kill me if I didn't leave the country, but, of course, that was just their talk, and I stayed there and kept on hunting."

"I wish you'd tell me about that, too, Hugh," said Jack.

"Well, I can only tell you about one thing at a time. I thought you wanted to hear about how I got those beaver."

"All right," replied Jack, "tell me about that first, and then about the Indians."

"Well," Hugh continued, "I was up quite a way on the Little Missouri, not anywhere near the head, of course, but about forty miles from the mouth, when there came a big rain and a warm spell, and all the snow melted at once, and pretty nearly the whole bottom of the river filled up. The beaver on that creek are all bank beaver. There are no houses at all, except maybe a few on some little creeks that run into the river. The weather got so bad and rainy

that I started down to go to Berthold, and as I traveled down the river about the first things that I began to see were beaver sitting around on the banks and on driftwood, stupid and confused, and not knowing enough to jump into the water when I came along. Of course, I began to kill them, shooting them through the head, and I soon saw that I had a big job on my hands, and that I could kill more in half a day than I could skin in two or three days. Besides that, I had been out some time and was short of ammunition. What I did was to kill in the morning what beaver I could skin in the rest of the day, and for two or three days I was kept mighty busy, and working hard late into the night. Then the river went down and the beaver disappeared, all going back into their holes again, I suppose. I made quite a bit of money on that trip, and if I had had a man with me to skin all the time I could have got twice as many as I did, maybe three times as many. I think if I'd had a helper I could have killed one hundred and twenty-five beaver without trying very hard. I've often thought if a man could go down the Little Missouri in a boat at such a time, and with one of these little pea rifles, he could get an awful lot of fur."

"But I don't understand, Hugh," inquired Jack, "how the beaver let you come right up to them and shoot them."

"Well," said Hugh, "of course I didn't walk right up to them, making plenty of noise; I went as quietly as I could and shot as carefully as I could, but the beaver seemed to have lost their wits. They weren't shy and watchful, as beaver 'most always are. They just sat there in the rain and looked miserable."

"Dear me," commented Jack; "if you could find beaver as plenty as that only a few years ago, what immense numbers of them there must have been in the old times."

"Yes," said Hugh, "it's wonderful to think of it,

of course, and yet you must remember that all the regular trapping had stopped more than twenty years before that, and that it was only once in a while a man came along and set some traps, and even then he didn't make a business of trapping. He got just a few beaver and then went on. And it's wonderful how quickly any sort of wild animal increases if they're let alone. I believe that you might trap out all the beaver, except one pair, from a stream, and then leave that stream alone for twenty years and go back there and you'd find just as many beaver there as there were the first time you visited it."

"That brings up another thing, Hugh, that I wanted to ask you about," said Jack. "How many young ones do the beaver have?"

"I think," replied Hugh, "that they have four, and maybe sometimes six. I know you take any place where there are three or four beaver houses, and if you can go there and watch them, and the beaver are not too shy, you'll see an awful lot of kittens playing around at the right time of the day. I don't believe that the beaver breed until they are two years old, because more than once I've seen what I took to be one family, which consisted of two old ones, four or five nearly as big as the old ones, and four or five only half grown. That makes me think that the young ones stay with their parents until they are considerably more than one year old, but when the young ones are about full grown, I expect the old ones drive them off. Beaver are pretty mean; they're great things to fight among themselves, and I've seen many a one all scarred and cut about his head and neck and shoulders, where he'd been fighting with another one. After the full-grown ones are driven off by their parents, I reckon they start out and either build themselves houses somewhere nearby, or perhaps go on up or down the stream, and either join some other colony, or build a dam for themselves."

"I don't understand, Hugh, how it is that the beaver know enough to build these dams which are strong enough to hold back the water in these creeks."

"Well, son, I don't believe that I can help you out a bit. All I know is, that the beaver do it, and that their dams are strong and hold back the water, and that if you go and break down a dam, so as to let the water run out of the pond, the beaver will come down that night and mend the dam, and the next morning you'll find the pond full, or nearly full. Somehow or other, they understand just how to put together sticks and stones and mud so that the dam will hold. Sometimes the dam runs straight across the creek, sometimes it curves a little downward, that is to say, the hollow of the dam looks up the stream; sometimes it curves a little the other way, so that the hollow of the dam looks down the stream. You'd think that this was the strongest way to build, and it has seemed to me the dams built in that shape are usually found on the strongest running streams, but I can't be sure about it, because I don't know that I ever took particular notice. Anyhow, I know that all people that I've ever seen, Indians and whites alike, think that the beaver is smart."

"I don't wonder," said Jack, "and now I remember," he went on, "that the Blackfeet have a lot of beliefs about the beaver. They think he's strong medicine."

"Sure, they do," said Hugh; "they have lots of beliefs about it, and they think it's one of the greatest animal helpers."

"I know they do," said Jack. "I remember now, that one time Joe took me to a ceremony where old Iron Shirt unwrapped a beaver bundle. I didn't know whether I would be allowed to see it, but Joe asked Iron Shirt, and he told me to come. I didn't understand what it was all about, but they unwrapped

the bundle, which had in it a great lot of the skins of birds and small animals, and while it was being unwrapped, and after it was opened, Iron Shirt prayed and sang, and then two or three women who were present to help, danced around on their knees in the queerest way you ever saw. Joe said they were imitating the beaver."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I saw one of those bundles unwrapped one time. It is a big ceremony. You know they have lots of stories about people that have been helped by the beaver. There's one of those stories about a poor young man who loved a certain girl, but he was so badly off and was so homely that she wouldn't have anything to do with him, so he went off and wandered over the prairie, feeling awful badly and wanting to die, and when night came he lay down by the stream to go to sleep, and while he was lying there a strange young man came to him and asked him to go to his father's lodge. The young man walked down to the edge of the stream and the poor boy followed him. When they got to the water's edge, the young man told the poor boy to follow him, and do just as he did. Then the young man dived into the water, and the poor boy followed him, and presently both came up inside of a lodge, and there sitting on the seats about the lodge were the old beaver, and when they got inside of the lodge the young man turned into a beaver, too. Then the old beaver spoke to the poor boy, and told him that he knew all about his trouble and wanted to help him, and asked him to spend the winter in his lodge. The poor boy was glad to do so, and during winter the old beaver taught him all their medicine, and gave him all their power.

"Then the next spring the poor boy went out of the lodge and joined a party of his people who were going to war, and by the help of the beaver he killed the

first enemy that they met, and scalped him, and this was the first time scalps were ever taken. This gave the poor boy great credit, and soon after he was able to marry the beautiful girl, and to become a head warrior, and later a big chief."

"That's a pretty good story, Hugh," said Jack.

"Yes," replied Hugh, "it's a pretty good story, but it is like a good many of those Indian stories which often have for their hero some poor, miserable young fellow who, being helped by some animal—his dream, they call it—comes out all right, and gets the thing that he wants."

"Of course, the Blackfeet," Hugh went on, "have a great deal of respect for the power of what they call the under-water people—*Suye tuppi*. I reckon you've heard about them."

"Yes," replied Jack, "they are people and animals that live at the bottom of lakes and streams, and have great power."

"That's it," said Hugh. "But it isn't the Blackfeet alone that have these strong beliefs about the beaver. I guess all Indians are alike in the way they look at these animals. I know the Pawnees and Cheyennes feel the same way. Both tribes have queer stories about them. I reckon I never told you about one thing that is said to have happened to a young Cheyenne man a long time ago."

"I don't remember it if you have, Hugh. What was it?"

"Well," said Hugh, "in ancient times, the Indians used to kill lots of beaver. They liked the meat, and they used to make robes of the hides. In those days they had no steel traps, and the only way that they could get beaver was either to shoot them with their arrows or to tear down the dams, and when the water had run off, to get them out of their houses. It was a good deal of work to pull down the houses, and they

used to train small dogs to go into the holes in the houses and worry the beaver until they would get mad and chase the little dog out through the mouth of the passage way, and there the Indian would be waiting with a club to knock the beaver on the head. Sometimes, however, the beaver would not come out far enough to be hit, and then they'd have to go into the house and kill them there, or pull them out.

"Once a party of people had torn down a dam and killed a number of beaver from the houses. But one man was working at a house, and couldn't get the beaver out of it. His dog would go in and bark, but the beaver would not come out to where the young man could kill him; so the young fellow got down and crawled into the passageway, and presently got close enough to the beaver so that he could get hold of its foot. He wasn't strong enough to pull it out, so he backed out of the hole and called to a woman on the bank to bring him a rope. When she had brought it, he crawled into the hole again and tied it to the beaver's foot, and then came out, and three or four people began to pull on the rope, so as to haul the beaver into the daylight. He came very slowly, moving forward only a short distance and then holding on, but at last they began to see something coming, and presently, when they had pulled this thing to the mouth of the hole, they were astonished and frightened to see that instead of being a beaver it was a queer little old white man whom they were pulling out by the rope tied to one of his legs. When they saw what they had at the end of the rope, they were all so frightened that most them ran away; but the young man who had tied on the rope, before running away, went down to the beaver house and took the rope off the old man's leg so that he might be free again. Then he climbed up onto the bank and hung the rope on a tree, and made a prayer, and went away himself."

"What do you suppose it was they saw, Hugh?" said Jack.

"Bless you, son, I have no more idea than you have. I reckon that what they saw was a beaver, but of course that was not what they thought they saw. You'll find lots of Indians that imagine that they've seen things, or that things have happened to them that you and I would say couldn't possibly have been seen, or couldn't possibly have happened. The Indians have got pretty strong imaginations and then again maybe they have eyes to see things that we white folks can't see. I have seen a whole lot of queer things in Indian camp, things that I couldn't explain, things that I've seen with my own eyes, yet that most white people would say were just my imagination."

"I know, Hugh; you told me about some of those things, and, of course, I can't see how they could possibly have happened, and yet because you saw them I believe that they did happen."

"Of course, son, you know that I think that they happened; but, of course, maybe I might have been fooled about them.

"Well, to go back to the beaver," he went on; "'most all Indians that I ever had anything to do with believe in a big old white beaver that is the chief of all beaver. I guess nobody ever saw him, but lots of people have seen him in dreams, especially in dreams where they went to the lodge of all the beavers. That is a dream that has come to a good many men, at least you often hear stories about people who have had the dream. This old white beaver is of great power. He knows about everything that has happened, and if by any chance he doesn't know about it himself, he calls all the other beaver together and asks them, and it's pretty sure that some one of them has some knowledge about the matter.

"You see, the beaver are scattered all over, inhabit all the waters, and are active, and going about all

through the hours of darkness, so they are very likely to know about things that have happened, about which all the people are ignorant; such things, for example, as women being captured and carried off at night, or war parties traveling at night. If a man has a beaver for his dream, he is pretty likely to be lucky in everything that he undertakes."

"All the animals seem to have been very important to the Indians," said Jack. "They didn't exactly worship them, but they believe that they had great power to help."

"Yes," agreed Hugh, "that is true, of course. The Indians pray to the spirits of the animals, and to the spirits of the mountains and rocks and trees, and ask them to help them, but the way I understand it, they don't worship any of these things. They pray to them just the same as white folks pray to saints, but way up above all these different spirits or medicines that the Indians talk about, there is some great person who has the power, and to him all these prayers are carried by the spirits that are prayed to. It's a mighty complicated thing, you see, son," he went on. "I can't understand it, and I reckon the Indians themselves don't understand it much better than I do, and I know they can't explain it. Some of them have tried to, but they get just about as far as I get, and then they are stuck."

"Well, I suppose religion is a pretty hard subject anyhow, Hugh," remarked Jack.

"I suppose it is," said Hugh, "and I reckon if you were to take a hundred white men out of the same church, and were to ask each one of them just exactly what his beliefs are, you would find that no two of the hundred would exactly agree."

They sat for a little while looking at the fire, and then Hugh said, "Well, son, we've had a pretty long day and I reckon it's about time to go to bed."

"That will suit me," said Jack, and they turned into their blankets.

CHAPTER XII

PROSPECTING FOR FUR

It was not yet light next morning when Jack was awakened by a dull tapping, not often repeated, and as his senses grew clearer it seemed to him that the sound was like that made by an animal stamping its hoof on the ground. He crept silently out of his blankets, felt about for his cartridge belt and gun, and when he had found both, crept to the door. He had hardly got there when he heard again, more faintly, a stamping of a hoof, and then a snort which he knew was made by a deer.

Meantime, Hugh had awakened, and, raised on his elbow, was watching Jack. The light was still so faint that objects could hardly be distinguished, but gradually, as the eastern sky began to flush and the light crept up toward zenith, Jack made out a deer standing fifty or sixty yards away, and looking at the tent, and then heard rather than saw it stamp its foot. Two or three times he put his rifle to his shoulder and glanced along the barrel, but he could not yet see his fore sight. Two or three times the deer stepped forward a little way, and then stopped and again stamped. Evidently the tent, shining white in the dim light of the morning, puzzled her, and she was trying to make out what it was. She had never seen anything like this before. As the light grew, Jack could see that it was a small doe, probably a yearling, and just the meat they needed. At length he put his gun to his shoulder again and found that he could see the sights, though not very clearly, and drawing a coarse sight and aiming

low down at the brisket of the animal, which stood facing him, he pulled the trigger. The deer sprang in the air, and then turning, ran swiftly toward the brush and disappeared.

"Get it?" asked Hugh, as Jack moved back on his bed and began to put on his trousers and shoes.

"I don't know," said Jack, "the light was too dim for me to see much. I ought to have killed her, but I could hardly see my sights. I wouldn't be much surprised, though, if we were to find her. She seemed to me to jump as if she had been hit."

In a very few moments Hugh and Jack were both dressed, and while Hugh began to kindle the fire, Jack walked off in the direction where the deer had last been seen. It was now full day, and before he had gone far the brilliant disk of the sun began to show over the eastern horizon.

The tracks were plainly seen where the deer had sprung into the air, and then turning, had run swiftly toward the willows. It was easy to follow the trail, but there was no blood, and this gave Jack rather a feeling of chagrin, for he did not like to feel that he had missed. As he went on the tracks were less deeply marked in the ground, rather as if—Jack thought—the animal had recovered from its fright. He had only just begun to think about this, when suddenly he almost fell over the deer lying in front of him. It had run about a hundred yards. Jack turned and looked back toward the tent and at that moment Hugh, who had been putting wood on the fire, turned his head and looked toward his companion. Jack waved his hat as a sign that he had found the animal, and then began to prepare it to take to camp. It was a young doe and quite fat, and Jack felt quite pleased that he had got so good a piece of meat. It did not take long to prepare it for camp, and as the animal was small, and the distance short, Jack took it by the ears

and easily dragged it over the smooth grass up to the camp.

"Well," said Hugh, as he stooped over and felt of the carcass, "that's good. A nice little white-tailed yearling, and quite fat. From now on we've got to kill bucks or yearlings or dry does, for the old ones that are nursing their young won't be fit to eat."

"It's queer, Hugh," said Jack, "I didn't find a bit of blood on the trail. I just followed the tracks, and I was watching them so closely that I almost fell over the deer at last. The bullet entered the breast low down and went through the whole length of the animal, and both where the bullet went in and where it came out, the skin had slipped to one side so as to cover the hole in the flesh. Of course she bled a lot, but not a drop of it came out of her body."

"Yes, that happens so every now and then in those shots that go through an animal lengthwise, and they're especially likely to happen if the animal was standing when the shot was fired, and then makes a big effort afterward."

Breakfast was nearly ready, and by the time Jack had washed his hands Hugh had poured out the coffee and they both sat down.

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "what are we going to do to-day? Shall we move, or shall we stop here one more night?"

"I think," said Hugh, "that the best thing we can do is to take the saddle horses and go on up the creek a few miles on this side and prospect. After we've done that, we can make up our minds what is best to be done, but it's pretty certain that we will want to go over and camp two or three nights by that pond that we saw yesterday."

"Yes," said Jack, "I should think that was something that we ought to do, sure."

It took but a few minutes to skin the deer and hang

the carcass up in one of the cottonwood trees, where it would be safe from any wolf or coyote that might come about the camp, and then catching up their riding horses, they saddled them and started up the stream.

For several miles the bottom was wide and usually thickly fringed with willows. Several times they dismounted, tied their horses, and went in as far as they could toward the main stream, but twice they were stopped by water, or mud, or by beaver sloughs that were too wide for them to cross. Hugh said little, but shook his head from time to time as he looked over the valley. It was evident that he was dissatisfied. Jack forebore to ask questions, for he could see that Hugh was occupied in observing, and was thinking hard. They had gone five or six miles up the valley, and it was now about noon, when, on rounding a point of willows, they could see before them quite a large pond.

Hugh drew up his horse and for ten or fifteen minutes sat there watching, and then drawing back, he rode up behind the willows, dismounted, and tied his horse. Jack did the same.

"This looks better, son," said Hugh. "We'll go in here afoot as far as we can and watch this pond and see what we can see. I think there are beaver here, and probably this is the place we want to camp by."

As quietly as possible they made their way toward the edge of the water, passing on the way several trails where the beaver had been dragging brush to the water. The signs showed that this had been done no longer ago than last night, for on the ground were scattered fresh, green willow and cottonwood leaves, and in two or three places the bark had been knocked off willow stems by whatever had been dragged along, and these wounds were absolutely fresh. Presently they came to the edge of the willows, and still keeping themselves concealed, crept up to a little knoll, where they sat down and peered through the tangle of stems

out over the pond. There before them was a long dam which Jack, with his experience of the day before fresh in his mind, could see had been recently worked on. Out in the water were a number of the hay-stack-shaped houses of the beaver, and even while they were looking, to Jack's astonishment and delight a beaver appeared on one of them, carrying in his mouth a long, white, peeled stick which he placed among others on the roof. Jack looked at Hugh, wondering if he had seen the beaver, too, and Hugh gave a little motion of his head. At two or three points on the dam animals were at work, beaver, of course, but too far off to be certainly recognized. Jack wished with all his heart that he had brought his glasses.

For nearly an hour they sat there, and then crept away as noiselessly as they had come, apparently unobserved by the animals.

When they had returned to their horses, Jack felt that he might speak. "Wasn't that a pretty sight, Hugh?" he said. "I don't think I ever saw anything quite as fine as that. I believe it would be a great deal more fun just to get up close to these beaver and watch the way they live, than it will be to trap them and kill them."

"So it would, son," said Hugh, "if we were just coming out for fun; and I reckon it's pretty nearly as good fun for me to watch them critters as it is for you. At the same time I feel as if we needed some of that fur that is swimming around there, and as if we were going to get it. It'll be quite a lot of work, but it's work that will be fairly well paid for."

"Yes, Hugh, of course you're right. I want to trap some beaver and get some fur, and either take it home or sell it; but didn't we have a good time when we were sitting out there watching those animals? I tell you, when that beaver crept up on the house there and put that white stick in it's place, my heart

A Beaver Appeared with a Long Stick, Which He Placed with Others on the Roof.—*Page* 130.

pretty nearly jumped out of my body. I never expected to see anything like that."

"Yes," agreed Hugh, "it was nice, I'll acknowledge that; and we're likely to see lots more of it. Of course we want to see the pleasant sights, and then besides that we want to get something to show for our trip. I think we'll do both. Come on now, let's mount and go on further. The day is only about half gone and I want to learn all I can."

From here on for quite a long way up the stream, beaver seemed abundant. The valley had grown much narrower, and instead of being a wide, grass-grown prairie with more or less morass about it, it was a narrow valley filled with beaver ponds, most of which seemed to be occupied.

They took a hasty survey of it and had no more opportunity to watch the animals at their work and their play. Several times as they were riding along the edge of the valley they startled white-tailed deer from the willows, but all those they saw were old does.

"I reckon," said Hugh, "that the fawns are too little as yet to run with their mothers. The old ones hide them and run away, and then just as soon as the danger is past they circle back and come close to them again. Curious thing, isn't it, son, that these little fawns don't give out any scent?"

"Mighty curious if it's so, Hugh."

"That's what people say," declared Hugh, "and I reckon likely it's true, because, if you think of it, you'll know that the wolves and coyotes are hunting all the time for these little fawns, and it's pretty sure that they don't find many of them. If they did, the deer wouldn't be half as plenty as they are."

"Then I suppose the white tails hide their young ones just as the elk and the antelope do," said Jack.

"Yes," said Hugh, "that's just what they do, or for a matter of fact just the way a buffalo cow hides

her calf, or a common cow hides hers. You see all these animals seem to have that one instinct. When their young ones are very small and too weak to run fast or far, they hide them, and the plan works well, too, for I guess it carries most of them through. That fawn that those two lynxes were eating the other day was probably either one that they stumbled on by accident, or else perhaps one that had died from some sickness. They do that sometimes."

The sun was only a couple of hours high when they turned their horses and, riding out on the prairie, galloped swiftly back to camp. The straight road and good pace made their return journey seem much shorter than it had been in the morning.

Supper over, they lounged about the fire, on which Jack had piled so much wood that it gave a bright and cheerful blaze. Hugh was evidently thinking over what he had seen during the day and making up his mind about to-morrow, and Jack, feeling lazy, stretched out on the ground near the fire, and presently went to sleep.

A little later Hugh called to him and said, "Rise up, son, and let us talk over what we are going to do. We'd better settle that before we go to bed."

Jack rubbed his eyes and sat up sleepily, while Hugh got out his tobacco and filled his pipe, and then sitting cross-legged before the fire and puffing out huge wreaths of smoke, he said to Jack, "Now, son, there are plenty of beaver here, and if we have any luck at all we could load one horse just from this stream. I don't know, though, whether it's going to pay us to spend weeks of time setting traps and skinning beaver. I think it's worth while for us to do some trapping and get some fur, but I doubt if it's worth our while to spend the whole summer doing it. Suppose to-morrow we move up close to that big pond that we found to-day and make camp there and then trap until we get

tired of it. When we've had as much as we want of this one place, we can move on and go somewhere else. It isn't quite as if we were trying to make money enough trapping to carry us over the winter. You don't greatly need the money that the fur would bring, and as for me, I've got my job, and it's no matter of life and death to get this fur. We're out here mainly for pleasure and for you to learn something about the country, and the ways of the things that live in it. We are free to do about as we please. What do you think?"

"Why, Hugh," replied Jack, "that seems to me a good way to look at it. Let's trap here as long as we want to, and then travel on and go somewhere else. I want to get up into the high mountains, and I suppose you do, too. We want to have a little hunting and to see as much of the country as we can."

"All right, son," said Hugh, "we'll let it go at that. And to-morrow morning in good season we'll move camp up the creek. I'll be glad to get these horses onto fresh grass. Of course, they are not working to amount to anything and don't greatly need the food, but I've sort of formed the habit of wanting my horses always to have the best there is going."

"All right," rejoined Jack; "the first thing when we get up to-morrow I'll bring in the horses and saddle them, and it won't take so very long to get started."

"No," Hugh assented, "that's one good thing about us, we travel pretty light and can go fast and far if we have to."

There was a little pause while Hugh knocked the ashes out of his pipe, got his tobacco and lighted the pipe again. Then Jack said to him, "Hugh, there's one thing I want to ask you about; how does it come that these beaver here are so tame and are out swimming around in the water in the middle of the day? I have always heard that in old times it was some-

times possible to see beaver out at their work in the early morning and again in the evening, but that during the day they were always in their holes. I thought that the beaver was a night animal, and that of late years, since it had been trapped and hunted so much, it never came out at all in the daytime."

"That is something, son, that I can't understand at all: why we've seen these beaver the way we have. I don't think I ever saw beaver acting just this way, though I've heard of old men, those that were out here trapping in the early days, say that in those times beaver were about all day long. They didn't talk as if the beaver were a night animal, but as if it were going about through the day, just, for example, as prairie dogs do, or whistlers, or others of these gnawing animals that we commonly see. I've an idea that it's only since people began to hunt the beaver that he has took to working nights and sleeping days, but of course I don't know anything about this; that's just my notion. Anyhow, from the way these beaver here are acting, I should say that it was a long time since they had been trapped or disturbed in any way, and that seems queer, for you see we are not very far from the railroad, and there are always idle people lying around a place like Laramie, people that believe they know how to trap, and who, if they knew of a place like this, would think they could make their everlasting fortune here. I wonder some of those fellows haven't found the place. Then, on the other hand, we're not so very far from where the Utes range, and it would seem to me only natural that some of their young men might run across a place like this and try to get the fur. Of course, if they had come they would have made a scatteration of these beaver by tearing down the dams and getting as many of the animals as they could out of the houses. But nothing has been disturbed; there's no sign of white people or In-

dians, and, what is a great deal better evidence, the beaver are absolutely tame. We'll get some of them before long, I reckon."

"I hope so," said Jack, as he rose to his feet and threw another stick or two on the fire. Then squatting down by it, he said: "Three or four days ago, Hugh, I asked you how big beaver were, and you told me, and ever since then I've been trying to think of something that my uncle told me two or three years ago about an old time sort of beaver that doesn't exist any more on the earth. I think it was what you were telling me about the Indians' belief in medicine beavers that made me think of it. Uncle George told me that out in Ohio there was found a skeleton, or part of the skeleton, of a great big animal just like a beaver, but about as big as a black bear. That would mean, I suppose, weighing three or four hundred pounds, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "about that."

"Well," said Jack, "this beaver lived in those old times, a good way back, but not nearly as far back as those older times when the coal was made. It lived about the same time that they used to have mastodons in this country."

"Hold on," said Hugh, "say that again. What is a mastodon?"

"Why," said Jack, "it's a great big animal, a good deal like an elephant. You have seen elephants, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "once when I was a small boy I saw one. He was a powerful big animal."

"Well," said Jack, "a mastodon was like an elephant, only bigger, and he was different in some ways, but I've forgotten how. I think it was something about his teeth. The mastodon didn't live such a very great while ago, because I remember Uncle George said that the bones of those that they have found had not yet turned to stone. Of course all these

fossils that come from the older times have changed into regular stone. They are just rocks with the shape of bones or shells or whatever it may be."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I know about that, because I've seen a heap of them. They're just rocks in the shape of the different things that they used to be."

"Well," said Jack, "anyhow the main thing is that in that time when there were mastodons in this country, there was also a big animal like a beaver, that would weigh several hundred pounds."

"He must have had fine fur," said Hugh, "but I reckon it would have been powerful hard work setting traps for that fellow. You'd have to have bear traps to catch him, and it's no joke to set a bear trap. You say all they know about him is that they found his bones?"

"That's all," said Jack. "Uncle George showed me a picture of a skull once, and I remember that it was longer than a wolf's skull, and it had two great big gnawing teeth reaching down from the front of the jaw."

"Powerful strange things there used to be on this earth a long time ago," said Hugh, in a meditative tone.

"Yes, indeed," answered Jack, "and think how little we, any of us, know about those things. Even the smartest men, those who have given up all their time to studying these things, don't seem to know much about those old times. I know it's awful easy to ask them questions that they can't answer."

"I suppose a man of that kind doesn't want to say anything unless he's dead sure it's so," said Hugh. "Likely enough he's made his reputation by always being right, and he's afraid to make any guesses."

"Maybe that is it," said Jack, "but I remember one time going to New Haven with my uncle, and we went into the Peabody Museum, and one of the professors

there, a Mr. Marsh, took us around and showed us the greatest lot of bones you ever saw. He could tell us a great many things about the skeletons and parts of skeletons that he showed us, but I know my uncle asked him a great many questions about other things, and he would just laugh and say he didn't know anything about it, and nobody else did."

"Well," said Hugh, "it's each man to his trade. I suppose I can hunt and trap and know something about animals, and these professors work over their birds and their bugs and their bones. Some of the stories they tell are pretty hard to believe, and yet I reckon they are all true."

"Oh, I guess so," said Jack.

The next morning before daylight had fairly broken, Jack was afoot and on his way out to the horses. They were brought in and tied up to the willows, their saddles put on and ropes coiled, picket pins got together, and all the various property of the camp, which so easily becomes scattered about, was collected before breakfast was ready.

The bear skin, which had now been drying for three or four days, was taken from the ground and brought into camp. Hugh, when he looked at it, said that it was in first-class condition and had not been burned by the sun.

"Save all these pins, son," he said, "wrap them up in a gunny sack; they may be useful to us later on, and may save us half a day's whittling."

"Now," he said, "you take hold of one side of this hide and I'll take hold of the other, and we'll fold it up hair side in and make it small enough to go on top of one of the packs. It won't frighten the horse so much, now that it has lost it's fresh smell."

They folded the hide as Hugh had said, and it made a small, flat package of convenient size to go in the load.

After they had eaten their breakfast, Jack took down the tent and folded it, rolled the beds, and got most of the packs ready. Hugh's kitchen was the last thing to be prepared, and then after a general tightening of the saddles, the loads were lashed on the horses' backs and they set out up the creek. Jack's last duty, and one which he performed at every camp, was to ride carefully about the fire, and about where the tent had stood, and look all over the ground, to see whether anything had been left behind.

It was nearly noon when they reached the new camp ground. A pretty spot, raised well above the level of the stream bottom, with a big fringe of willows to the west, which would give shelter from any storm rushing down the mountains, and a little grove of cottonwoods which made a pleasant shade and would furnish fuel. Along a ravine which emptied into the bottom there grew a few box elder trees.

"Well, Hugh, this is a good camp," said Jack.

"First-class," replied Hugh, "all except the water. Suppose you go down into the willows there and see if you can find a spring. There must be water right close by here, but I haven't seen any."

In a few minutes Jack returned, reporting an excellent though small spring right in the edge of the willows close to the camp.

"We ought to dig it out, son, and make it bigger, if we are going to water the horses there," remarked Hugh.

"All right," said Jack, "I'll do that now."

After the tent had been put up, two of the horses picketed, and dinner eaten, Hugh said to Jack, "Now, son, if you want to go off on a prospecting tour this afternoon, you better go. I am going to be busy all the afternoon looking over my traps and making my medicine."

"Your medicine, Hugh," asked Jack, "what is that?"

"My beaver medicine," Hugh answered; "that is the stuff we are going to use to make the beaver come into the trap."

"Oh, yes," said Jack, "I know; I've heard about that. It's a great secret how it's made, isn't it, Hugh? I used to ask the trappers up among the Blackfeet, and they always made some joke about it and never would tell me what it was."

"Well," answered Hugh, "you'll find all trappers are just like that, but before we get home I guess you will see me make it, and then if you use your eyes and nose, perhaps you'll learn how to make it yourself. But this afternoon," he went on, "I am going to take out my traps and go over them, see that they work well, and get them ready to set to-morrow. If you want to go hunting or looking around, or studying anything, you go ahead and do it, only I'd get back here an hour or two by sun, so that we can have our supper by daylight."

"All right," said Jack. "I think I'll take my rifle and walk on up the creek. We don't greatly need any meat, but I might see something that was worth shooting at."

"Well," said Hugh, "if I were you I wouldn't shoot much down in the valley. I'd like to keep everything about camp as quiet as possible for the next two or three days."

"I'll remember it," said Jack, and rising he took up his rifle and strode off up the stream.

CHAPTER XIII

A LION'S LEAP

A COOL breeze was blowing down from the mountains, and although the sun was warm it was not uncomfortably hot. Here and there little wisps of smoke drifted from points on the mountainside where some old log was still smouldering, but the fire as a whole seemed to have been extinguished by the rain. Away down to the south the mountainsides were all black, and from the border of the burned country great tongues of the same dark color here and there stretched out into the green timber that clothed the unburned mountainside, showing where the onrushing flames had scorched the tops of the pine trees; but to the north of this the timber was still brightly green.

Before Jack had gone far, the valley grew narrower and the hills on either side higher. On his side of the stream the bluffs now drew closer to the willows, and were occasionally broken down into Bad Land shapes, where no grass grew and where the clay was deeply guttered by the rain.

In the ravines, which at short intervals broke through these steeper bluffs, grew huge old cottonwoods, not very tall, but thick, and with gnarled, twisted branches. Evidently at some seasons of the year great quantities of water passed down through these ravines, for their beds were deeply washed.

In the valley and on the hillsides Jack saw many antelope, but there was meat enough in camp to last them for a day or two, and it hardly seemed to him worth while to kill anything. "At least," he thought, "if I do fire a shot, I will wait until I have started

back toward the camp, so that I can carry the meat with me as I go in."

As he went on he kept watching the willows to his left, thinking that at any time a white-tail deer might appear among them, and he kept an equally good look-out on the bluffs and up the ravines to his right, where there was always a possibility of seeing a black tail or even a mountain sheep.

He was standing looking up one of these ravines, watching a doe antelope that had been feeding there, which, having seen him, was trotting off further up the ravine, when, without the slightest warning, as the doe was passing under the branches of a huge old cotton-wood that grew on the border of the watercourse, something yellow sprang out from the branches of the tree, and descending on the doe, struck her to the ground. Although she was a long way off, Jack could hear her bawl in fright, and he instantly saw that a panther had been resting among the branches of this tree, and had sprung at the doe as she passed by.

The doe and the panther were in plain sight as he stood there, but dropping to the ground he crept swiftly to a little coulée which led down to the bottom of the ravine, and running down this, he started up the ravine as fast as he could. The watercourse was narrow, its sides steep, and its bottom entirely dry. The big cottonwood from which the panther had leaped was the first one in the ravine, and by watching its branches he could tell when it would be necessary for him to begin to go cautiously in order to creep up and get a shot at the great cat. For the most part, the bed of the ravine was covered with sand, over which he could run noiselessly, but every little while he came to a bed of drift pebbles, and here he felt obliged to go more slowly. Presently the towering crown of the great cottonwood came in sight again, now not more than seventy-five yards distant, and Jack

began to look for a place where he could climb up the steep banks of the ravine to get a shot. In a moment more a little side wash gave him the opportunity that he sought, and clambering up four or five feet of broken-down clay, he found himself in a coulée, which furnished an easy way to the level ground above. Taking advantage of another little side wash that came in, he presently found himself on the level ground where the cottonwood stood, and looking through the sage brush, he tried to catch a glimpse of the panther. For a moment or two he could see nothing of it, but then something white caught his eye, and raising his head a little higher, he saw the white breast and belly of the doe, and the panther stretched out beside her with his teeth apparently fixed in her neck.

The panther's eyes were half closed, almost as if it were asleep, and it was paying no attention to its surroundings. This time Jack thought that he could try to make a close shot, and resting his elbow on his knee, he sighted carefully for the panther's head, and pulled the trigger. The animal did not move, but when the smoke cleared away and Jack looked again he saw that the beast's head was turned a little to one side, and that its cheek was resting on the doe's neck. He felt pretty confident that his ball had gone where he wished it to, and taking two or three loose cartridges in his right hand, he rose to his knees and took a long stare at the panther. Still it did not move, and when, after a slow approach, he had come close to it, he could see just over its eye a little red spot, and circling round to the other side, he saw a larger bleeding hole from which the hall had emerged.

When he pulled the panther away from the doe and turned her over to look at her, he saw that the cat must have leaped short, for on her hips were marks of four deep scratches where the sharp claws of one paw had sunk into the antelope's skin, and then on her

left side at the shoulder were the marks of the other paw. Except for that the doe was unhurt, save where the panther had bitten her throat. Jack made up his mind that he would take a part of the doe to camp, as well as the panther's skin.

It took him some time to skin the cat, and then rolling up the hide, and cutting off the hams and saddle of the doe, he put both on his back and went down the ravine to the valley. It seemed to him that the weather had grown much warmer, but he forgot that he had been first running and then working hard.

When he reached the valley, he was undecided whether to go back to camp at once or to keep on a little further up the stream and see if there was anything more worth seeing, but when he looked at the sun he saw that there were yet three or four hours before its setting, and he determined to continue his walk; so he went down to the edge of the willows and among them hid his meat and his panther hide, and then kept on slowly up the stream.

A mile or two further on he came to a place where the willows ceased, and the stream bending toward the side up which he was traveling had been dammed and spread out in a pond which reached almost across the valley, and on his side came almost up to the bluffs.

It was not a new dam, for along the borders of the pond grew tall rushes, almost as high as his head. He entered them to see if he could get to the water's edge and look out over the pond, but hardly had he stepped among them when, almost from under his feet, a duck sprang up and flapped away through the reeds, as if unable to fly. Jack knew, of course, that he had startled the duck from her nest, and that her pretense of being wounded was only a ruse to draw him away from her precious eggs, and looking down on the spot from which she had sprung he saw something white, and pushing aside the reeds with his hand, saw a mass

of pale gray down and feathers, and when he had parted this with his fingers, he saw beneath it half a dozen smooth, cream-colored eggs.

He left the nest undisturbed and tried to peer through the reeds to get a look at the duck, which was now swimming about in the water calling excitedly. Presently he got a good glimpse of it and saw that it was a female shoveler duck. A few steps further toward the water's edge he found the ground so soft and miry that he could go no further, and drawing back, he walked toward the bluff through the rushes, and before he had gone far had found three more duck's nests. This seemed to be a great breeding place. A little further on the rushes ended, and as he stepped out of them he startled from the shore, just above the water's edge, a multitude of birds, some of which flew away low over the water, half flying and half running over it, while others swam away, sunk almost below the surface, and after they had gone a little further, disappeared entirely. Jack knew, of course, that the first of these were coots or mud hens, and the others were grebes, and he knew also that somewhere close by would be found their nests. After looking around a little bit he saw in the edges of the rushes, and seemingly floating on the water, little bunches of grass or other vegetation, which he thought must be nests, and as he wanted to see what was in them he looked around to find how he could get out to them. The mud was so deep that he dared not wade to them, for he remembered the narrow escape that he had two or three years ago when he had been caught in the quicksands of the Musselshell River, and had been saved from drowning only by the timely arrival of Hugh.

Then he began to look about to see if he could not find a long stick or pole which he could throw on the mud, and on it could wade out to the nests, but nothing

of the sort was near. Then it occurred to him that if he went very carefully through the reeds and bent them down to step on, they might keep him from sinking deep into the mud and might support him until he got out to the nests. At all events this was worth trying, though he determined to be very cautious about it. He stripped off his clothes, except his shirt and hat, and then going down through the reeds, bent them over, and stepping on them as he went, and every now and then resting his foot on a bunch of the roots, he managed to get out to the nearest nests. They were loosely built of dead stems of the rushes, roughly piled together and apparently floating on the water, but anchored to the bottom by two or three green stems that grew up through the nest. The eggs were nearly oval, a little bigger than a pigeon's egg, and all of a soiled white color, and lying apparently in the water. These Jack decided must be the nests of the grebes, for he remembered that the eggs of the coots are spotted, and besides, would be larger than these eggs.

His footing was so uncertain that he was satisfied with the inspection of two or three of the nests, and then made his way quickly to shore. It took him a long time to get rid of the mud that he had picked up in his journey, but at last he got dressed and kept on around the pond. As he reached a point close to the bluffs where he could see the whole width of the pond, he was astonished to see the great number of birds that were living on it. A few of them were ducks, but the most were smaller birds, coots, grebes, phalaropes, and sandpipers. All of them seemed to be in companies, and Jack concluded that the birds that he could see were probably the males, whose mates were scattered about near at hand, sitting on their nests. Near a little point of tall wire grass which extended out into the pond, Jack saw a pretty sight, a family of

little Carolina rails, such as he had often heard his uncle talk about. The mother walked deliberately about the soft mud, bobbing her head and from time to time jerking her absurdly small tail, while following her in single file were nine tiny black objects not much larger, it seemed to him, than bumble bees, black and downy, evidently her newly hatched chicks. Now and then the mother would run hurriedly in one direction or another and catch something in her bill, and then would utter a call which brought the little ones close about her. Then, seemingly she would drop her prey on the ground, and the little ones would scramble for it.

Jack lay on the ground for some little time watching this pretty sight, and then suddenly he noticed that the sun was beginning to get low, and realized that it was time for him to start for camp. He hurried back as fast as he could, and before long found his meat and his panther's skin undisturbed, and putting them on his back, went on, reaching camp just before sundown.

Hugh had supper cooked and was sitting by the fire, smoking.

"Well, son," he said, "I didn't know but what maybe you had got lost. I see that you've been busy. What's that you've got—a piece of antelope meat and a lion?"

"That's what, Hugh," said Jack. "I tell you, I've had a great time this afternoon. A whole lot of fun, and a lion's skin."

"Well," said Hugh, "you surely have had a good time. I expect I'd have been glad to have gone with you if I had known you were going to see a lion. How did you get him?"

So, while they were eating supper, Jack told Hugh the story of the killing of the lion, and then talked with him at great length about the sights he had seen on the beaver pond.

"Yes," said Hugh, "there are sure lots of birds on all these ponds, and as we were saying only the other day, they breed here and nothing much disturbs them."

"But, Hugh," asked Jack, "why don't the wolves and the coyotes make it their business to hunt around these ponds and catch the old ducks and eat their eggs, too? I should think that a family of coyotes could easily enough clean out all the birds on a pond."

"Well," replied Hugh, "that's something that I've often thought about, and I don't know why they don't do it. Once in a long time, of course, you will find a duck's nest or a nest of a sage hen where the old bird has been caught and the eggs eaten, but that is something that you don't often see. I suppose, perhaps, one reason is that the birds are always on the lookout, and if they see or hear an animal they fly off, pretending to be injured, and the animal chases them, just as I remember I once saw you chase an old grouse that led you away from her young ones. Still, all I can say is that I don't know why it is that more nesting birds are not destroyed by wolves, coyotes, foxes, badgers, and skunks."

"Now, some of those nests that I found, nests that belonged, I think, to the grebes, were floating out in the water and a little way from the shore," said Jack. "I can understand how they would be safe, because an animal would have to go through deep mud and water to get them; but why the ducks' nests, that are built on the shore, and often up on the high land and at a little distance from the water, are not all of them robbed by these animals, I don't see."

"No," said Hugh, "that's a puzzler, I'll confess. You remember how plenty the birds are about some of those little, shallow lakes we passed up in the northern country. There'd be quite a flock of geese and a great lot of ducks and all sorts of wading birds, big and

little, living on them all summer, and when autumn came, the water would be nearly covered with the birds, showing, as it seems to me, that the breeding birds had all had pretty good luck in raising their young."

"Well, anyhow, Hugh, it was mighty good fun going around the edge of the lake there, and seeing all these birds, and one of the funniest sights I saw was a little mother rail and nine little chickens, each one of them hardly bigger than the end of your finger."

"What is this bird you call a rail, son?" asked Hugh. "I reckon I don't know it by that name."

"Why," replied Jack, "it's a pretty small bird that lives in the tall grass on the edge of the water. It's sort of greenish brown above, with some white marks, has long legs, a little bit of a tail, a short bill, and a body not much bigger than that of a blackbird."

"Why," said Hugh, after a moment's thought, "that must be one of those sacred birds that the Blackfeet Medicine Lodge women put on their sacred bonnets. You mean a little, short-winged bird, don't you, that when you see it, 'most always runs into the grass instead of flying away, and if you do make it fly, it flies very slowly for a short way and then drops down into the grass again?"

"Yes, Hugh," Jack answered; "that's the very bird. Back East they shoot them, and they're splendid eating."

"Well," said Hugh, "there isn't more than a mouthful of flesh on each one of them. I reckon it would take a good many to make a meal for me."

"That's so," said Jack; "they're pretty small, but they're awful good. The way people shoot them is like this. The birds in the autumn come down from the north and live in the tall grass and reeds along the edge of the bays and rivers. They pick up their

food among the grass and on the muddy flats, but when the tide rises they are forced up from the ground, and walk among the reeds and grass on the floating vegetation. When the tide gets up nearly to the top, the gunners start out in flat-bottomed boats, two men to a boat. The shooter stands in the bow, and in the stern is a man with a long pole, who shoves the boat through the grass, and as it goes along it disturbs the rails, which have to get up and fly a little way to get out of the boat's road. When they rise out of the grass the gunner shoots at them. In old times they say that there used to be thousands of these rail in the marshes, and sometimes a man would get from a hundred to a hundred and fifty in a tide, that is, in two to three hours. As soon as the tide gets low enough so that the boat can no longer shove easily over the mud flats and through the grass, the rail can run faster than the boat can go, and the shooting is over."

"Well," said Hugh, "that seems to me mighty queer—killing these little bits of birds just for the fun of it. It must cost a man quite a lot to do shooting of that kind."

"Yes," said Jack. "Of course men do it for amusement, and not for what they make out of it. Why, I think they pay the shover a dollar and a half or two dollars a tide, and then, of course, the ammunition costs something, and perhaps a man has to go quite a long journey on the railroad to get to the rail grounds."

"Well," said Hugh, "I don't believe I'd find much fun doing that sort of thing; but then," he continued, "I don't find much fun in hunting nowadays; it's simply a question of getting something to eat."

"Yes," said Jack, "I understand what you mean. Out here where game is so plenty the fun of hunting is largely taken away. I expect that it is the doubt

in hunting, the uncertainty whether you are going to get a shot or not, that makes hunting interesting."

"I reckon that's it," said Hugh. "It's the gamble that there is in it; the chance that there is about it, that makes men like it. But say, son," he continued, "before we forget it I want to tell you something about these little rail birds. You know they've got mighty short wings and it seems hard for them to fly. Now what do you think the Indians up north say about these birds?"

"I am sure I don't know, Hugh; what is it?" asked Jack.

"Why, they say that these birds make their journeys north and south on the backs of the cranes—not herons, I don't mean, those fellows that live along the water—but regular sandhill cranes; those fellows that make so much noise flying over in spring and fall."

"Well," said Jack, "that's funny, and that reminds me of something, too; but first I want to ask how they know that the rail migrate in that way; what makes them think so?"

"I've asked that question, too," said Hugh, "and this is what old Saiyeh told me——"

"Saiyeh—that's Mad Wolf, isn't it, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Yes," said Hugh; "old Mad Wolf, he said that once when he was out on the prairie with two or three other men, they saw some cranes coming, and hid, and the cranes flew over them and they shot at them and perhaps killed one or two, and when they fell to the prairie, two or three of these little birds came down with them."

"That's mighty interesting," said Jack; "and that reminds me of something that I have read, written by some German who studied birds. He said that there were some small birds of Europe that crossed the

Mediterranean by riding on the backs of the wild geese."

"That's queer, too," said Hugh; "and yet I don't see why it might not be so."

"Oh," rejoined Jack, "there was a jong, long article about it in one of the New York papers, copied from some paper printed in Europe. I wish I could remember more about it. It gave the names of the different kinds of little birds that were thought to cross that big water in that way, and it also told about some African people, perhaps they were Arabs, who knew and always had known that these little birds made their journeys north and south in that way."

"Now, tell me, son, you are a good deal younger than I am; isn't there some white man's story about a dispute among the birds as to which one could fly the highest, and doesn't the story say that the eagle flew highest, but that some small bird got on his back, and after the eagle had turned to come down, flew a little higher still, and then came down and won the prize?"

"Yes," said Jack, "there is just such a story. The little bird that beat the eagle was the wren, a tiny little bird."

"Well," said Hugh, "I suppose there have been a whole lot of mighty smart men that have been trying for a long time to find out all about birds, but I reckon there are some things left yet that they do not know."

"I guess so," said Jack, "a whole lot of things."

"Hugh," he went on, after a pause, "the Indians must have a great many beliefs and stories about birds and animals, haven't they? I don't mean sacred stories, or stories where birds and animals help them, but just tales about the animals, and how they live and what they do."

"Yes," said Hugh; "they do so. Of course, you know that there are lots of Indians who believe that

they can understand the talk of the wolves. If they hear a wolf howling they know that he is speaking, telling them some news or other, and they can understand him and interpret for him to other Indians that don't understand the wolf's speech. Then, there are some Indians, Blackfeet, who say that they can understand what the meadow lark says when he is singing. The Cheyennes say this, too, but they say that the meadow lark says only one thing; that is, the song always repeats, 'I come from Tallow River.' Tallow River, you know, is the South Platte River. The Blackfeet names for the killdee and for the big curlew are in imitation of the cry of each bird. Blackfeet call the little chickadee 'Neo-po-muki,' and that means, according to them, 'summer is coming.' Yes, there are a whole lot of beliefs and stories about birds and animals that are pretty interesting. Of course, the birds and the animals seem a whole lot closer to the Indians than they do to us. They come pretty near to being the Indian's comrades and every day associates. There is one story that old Shell, a Cheyenne Indian, told me once, that I thought was a mighty good story, and if you like I'll try to repeat it to you before we go to bed."

"I wish you would, Hugh," said Jack. "I always like to hear those stories, and it seems to me that you know an awful lot of them."

"Well," replied Hugh, "I've heard a lot of them in my time, and I wish that I could remember them all. This is what old Shell told me as near as I can remember. He said: 'A long time ago my father was out walking in the hills and he came to a high cut cliff. The cliff was broken and overhung a little, and almost everywhere it was covered with the mud nests of swallows. It was about the time in spring when the eggs hatch, and the swallows were flying about gathering food and bringing it to the young ones.

They were thick about the nests, and made a great deal of noise. My father sat there and looked at them for quite a long time. Presently he saw the birds gathering in great numbers about a particular place on the cliff, and when he looked carefully to see what attracted them, he saw a great snake crawling along on a ledge. Presently the snake came close to a lot of nests built all together, and raised its head and put it into one nest after another and ate the young birds. The swallows kept flying at the snake, but they could not stop it. All at once all the birds gathered together and flew in a great throng away to the east. All the old ones were gone; none were left about the nests. While my father sat there wondering where they had gone, he saw the swallows coming back in a great black bunch, and flying in front of them was a swift hawk, which every now and then whistled as it flew along. The birds came on and when they were close to the cliff the hawk whistled loud. When he did that, the snake raised its head and turned it toward the hawk, and the hawk turned aside and flew by the snake and flew away out of sight. When the hawk turned aside and flew by the snake without doing anything to it, the swallows made a great noise and followed him as he flew away, calling as if asking him to come back. So all the birds flew over the hill out of sight, but my father sat there waiting to see what would happen.

"'Before long he saw the swallows come back over the hill a second time, and now the bird leading them was a bald eagle, and as it flew it whistled as eagles do. When the eagle drew near to the snake, the snake raised its head and looked at the eagle, and when the snake looked, the eagle seemed to be afraid, and it turned and flew away out of sight, the swallows following it and making still more noise.

"'A third time the swallows came back over the hill,

and flying in front of them was a gray eagle, and as it drew near, the gray eagle whistled as the bald eagle had done. The gray eagle came up flying swiftly, but when the snake raised its head and looked at the eagle it seemed as if a flash of light blazed from the snake's eyes, and the gray eagle made the same turn as the others had made, and flew away out of sight, while all the swallows made a mournful noise.

" 'The gray eagle flew out of sight down the creek, and the swallows followed it and were gone a long time. Pretty soon, though, they could be seen coming back just like a black mass, and this time their leader was a heron. When the heron drew near the side of the cliff the snake raised its head and looked at the bird, and it seemed as if blue sparks of fire flew from the snake's eyes. The heron did not turn aside from the snake when it raised its head, but flew straight on, and when he had come close to the snake he ran his bill clear through its body and it fell to the ground and died, and the swallows gathered around the snake in great crowds and trampled all over it.' That is the way old Shell said that the swallows tried to save their children."

" That's sure a good story, Hugh," said Jack. " It's got the same old number four in it, hasn't it?"

" Yes," said Hugh; " of course we look to find that in every Indian story. You'll have to try four times before you succeed at anything."

" Well, son," he said, " let us go to bed. We ought to be starting out in good season to-morrow, for unless I am mistaken we'll have quite a long day of it."

XIV

SETTING FOR BEAVER

"WELL, son," said Hugh, as he was cooking breakfast next morning, "we've got a full day's work cut out for us, and we'd better make it as light as possible. You may as well go and catch up the saddle horses and bring them in. We have a load of traps to carry, but we can put them on our saddles. Down in this country, and at this time, we can set our traps without danger, and yet, just as a matter of habit, we'd better take our guns along. Those and the ax and our traps and my bottle of 'medicine' will be all that we'll need."

"All right," said Jack; "I'll go now, and bring the horses in and saddle up"; which he did.

By the time the horses were saddled, breakfast was ready, and soon after they had finished, the sack of traps was emptied on the ground, and Hugh tied four behind his saddle, and Jack four behind his.

"My, but these traps are heavy," observed Jack; "and strong, too. I should think that they would hold any animal except, perhaps, a bear."

"Yes," said Hugh, "they're strong enough, and they've got to be to hold a beaver, for he pulls pretty hard when he gets his foot in a trap. However, if they are properly set he doesn't have a chance to struggle long, for he plunges right for deep water and the trap holds him down, so that he drowns."

Just as they were about to start, Hugh disappeared into the tent, and rummaging around among the packages there, presently emerged with a good-sized stick of wood in his hand, to one end of which was

tied a long buckskin thong forming a loop, which he hung over his head so that the stick rested on his breast.

Jack looked at it in some astonishment, and then saw that the stick was apparently a big wooden bottle formed of a birch stick three inches or more in diameter, in which a hole had been bored. This hole was stopped by a wooden plug driven into the hole, thus corking the bottle tightly. Evidently the stick had been used a long time, for it was worn and polished by much handling.

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "I suppose that is your beaver medicine, but I never had any idea that you carried it in a bottle like that."

"Yes, son, that's the bottle, and I have used it for a good many years. You know that in old times when I first came out into this country glass bottles and tin cans weren't very plenty here, and glass doesn't last long anyhow. This is the sort of a bottle that everybody used in early days, and I've had this for a long time and had considerable luck with it."

"I never dared ask you what the medicine was made of, Hugh," said Jack, "but I suppose when you get to using it you'll let me have a smell of it, won't you?"

"Sure," said Hugh. "That's what it's made for, to be smelled of. But before you know what beaver medicine is made of, you'll have to be a real trapper."

The two swung themselves into the saddles and started off up the stream. Jack carried the ax, the head of which was protected by a leather case which covered its cutting edge, in his rifle scabbard under his leg.

"Now, son," said Hugh, "judging from what you said yesterday about the creek above here, I believe it's worth our while to ride quite a way up and see whether it gets narrow. If it does, we can perhaps

set our traps first up there, because they will be easier to handle. I don't want to set around these big ponds if I can help it. There is too much danger of our losing some of our traps, and then if a beaver gets out into deep water it's barely possible that we might lose the float-stick, or else that it might get hidden, and even if we should find it out in deep water there's no way to get at it except to swim for it. You and I don't want to do that if we can help it. This water is pretty cold, for it comes right down from the snow."

"That is one of the things I was wondering about, Hugh; how you were going to find your traps or your beaver in case they got out into the water in these ponds a long way from shore."

"I'll show you how we fix that sort of thing, son; but as I say, we haven't traps enough to take very much risk."

As they went on up the stream Jack pointed out to Hugh where he had killed the panther the day before, and showed him the pond where he had seen the birds.

Not very far above this they came to a place where a few willows grew, and where a beaver dam, holding back the water, had made a long, narrow, and rather deep pond running through the meadow.

"There," said Hugh, pointing to it, "that looks like a good place to set, but we'll go on further and see what we find."

Above this pond the stream for some distance rippled noisily over a rocky bottom, but soon they came to another dam, above which was found another long and narrow pond with two or three houses near its lower end. At two places toward the upper end there were grassy points which projected into the pond, and one of which ran nearly across it.

"That looks like a good place for us to set a couple of traps, son," said Hugh. "Now, I wish that you would go into that pine timber just at the edge of the

meadow and get me a couple of dead pines if you can find them, six or eight feet long and three inches through at the butt. Then sharpen the butt end so that I can drive it good and deep into the mud, so that it will hold. When you get the sticks, come around by the outer edge of the meadow and then ride in as near the edge of the pond as you can, coming well below me. I am going over now to the edge of the water to sort o' prospect."

Jack rode up into the timber and soon found a couple of young, dead trees which he chopped down, and from which he cut the required lengths. Then trimming the branches from the sticks, he sharpened the butt of each, and hanging one of them on either side of the horse, rode slowly back.

Hugh's black horse was grazing at the edge of the meadow, and Hugh himself could be seen down close to the water's edge.

Jack left Pawnee by Hugh's horse, and taking the sticks on his shoulder walked over to the water's edge, making a circle so as to come toward Hugh from the down-stream side. Before he had reached the water, Hugh signed to him to stop, and then came back toward him and said, "There's a good place here for two traps, and I'll set them, and you may as well come with me and watch what I do." Jack noticed that Hugh had stuck in his belt half a dozen straight willow twigs from a foot and a half to three feet long and about as large around as a lead pencil.

"Now, the first thing you want to remember, son, is that you mustn't leave any sign or any scent for the beaver to notice. They're smart animals, and if they see anything unusual, or if they smell anything strange, it puts them on their guard and you're not likely to have them go to your traps. Of course, here it's a little different because these beaver seem so tame, but you may as well try to begin right."

"Now I'm going to set two traps, one on each of these little points that you see running out into the pond. We've got to start in here and walk in the water up to where we're going to set, and I think that right close under the bank here we'll find the bottom hard enough for us to travel on. Just away from the bank it drops off sharply, and that is the best kind of water to set in for beaver. Now I will go ahead with these traps and you follow after me, carrying those sticks. You've cut them just about right, and I'll show you pretty soon what they're for. They are what we call float-sticks."

Hugh took two of the heavy traps in his hand and entering the water began to wade up the stream. Jack noticed that he kept far enough from the banks so that his clothing did not touch any of the overhanging grass or weeds. The water was not so deep as Jack had supposed, and did not come up within several inches of the tops of his rubber boots. He stepped into the water after Hugh, and tried to imitate all his motions, dragging after him the two float-sticks, but keeping also away from the bank. Presently Hugh stopped at the lower of the two points and waded out a step or two, but the water deepened so rapidly that he at once drew back. He now turned to Jack, and reaching toward him Jack passed Hugh one of the float-sticks. Hugh made a large loop of the long chain which was attached to the trap and passing it over the small end of the pole let it down to within a foot or two of the butt, and then drew the loop close between the stubs of the branches which Jack had cut off in trimming the little tree. Hugh took some pains with this, working on the chain until it tightly encircled the stick and could not be pulled up or down. Then taking the stick by its smaller end, he felt with it for the bottom some six or eight feet out from the bank, and when he had found a place that was

satisfactory to him, thrust the sharpened end of the stick into the mud at the bottom. By repeated efforts he drove the stick so deep that the end which he held in his hand was almost submerged. Meantime, the trap, which was fast to the other end of the chain, lay on the bottom close to his foot. He now took the trap, and rolling up his sleeves, stood with one foot on either spring of the trap and by his weight bent these springs down so that he could set the trap. Then holding it by the chain he lifted the trap out of the water and brought it within ten or twelve inches of the grassy margin of the pond. Then he said to Jack, who stood silently near him, "We can't do much talking here, son, but after we get these traps set I'll explain to you what I've been doing, and why. Take notice, though, that I'm putting this trap in pretty shallow water, but that there's deep water just outside."

Hugh worked a little while on the bottom until he had scraped out a flat, firm bed in which the trap was placed, then from the up-stream side of the trap he scraped up one or two handfuls of soft mud and scattered it above the trap so that two or three minutes later, when the water had cleared, Jack could barely see the outline of the jaws showing in the mud which covered trap and chain. Then Hugh drew from his belt one of the shorter of the willow twigs, submerged it, and with his knife, also held under water, split the twig in half a dozen places for an inch or two from the end. Then he returned his knife to its sheath, and still holding the twig under water with his other hand, drew the cork from the bottle of beaver medicine, lifted the twig from the water and thrust the split end into the bottle and drew it out dripping with a brownish fluid, the odor of which, as it came to Jack's nostrils, seemed exactly that of a rotten apple. Then Hugh thrust the other end of the willow twig into

the bottom on the shoreward side of the trap, so that the split end stood about ten inches above the trap. "There," said Hugh, "that's done. Now let's go on, but be very careful when you come to the trap to keep out from the shore as far as you can, and to step well over the chain."

A little further on, when they came to the second point, this operation was repeated almost in the same way, except that here Hugh took eight willow twigs and thrust them into the bottom, running out toward the deep water, four on the up-stream side of the trap and four on the down-stream side, the twigs being so arranged as to form a wide V which might guide the beaver toward the bait-stick which formed the apex of the V. In arranging these guiding wings, Hugh was careful not to touch any part of the twigs which projected above the water with his hand, but when he thrust the twigs into the bottom he held his hand under water, and the portion of the twig that he had touched was also under water.

Hugh and Jack now retraced their steps, going down the stream until they reached the point where they had entered it. Then Hugh motioned Jack to go ashore, and after he had done so, Hugh splashed the bank where Jack had stepped, plentifully with water, and passing on a few yards further down the stream left it by a little bay, the shore of which he plentifully wetted with water before he stepped out on the grass. Then the two went over to their horses, mounted, and rode up the stream.

Jack had watched closely what Hugh had done and understood why most of the operations that he had gone through with had been performed, yet there were many questions that he felt like asking.

"Now, son," said Hugh, after they had reached the upper end of the meadow, "let us go into this little piece of pine timber of yours and cut some more float-

sticks; it is worth our while to carry some of them along with us. I don't know whether in trimming those sticks you intended to leave those branches sticking out as long as you did, but whether you meant to do it or not, it was just the right thing."

"Yes, Hugh," said Jack, "I understood from what you had told me what you wanted those sticks for, and of course I could see that you wanted them fixed so that the chain in the trap would not slip either way."

"That's it, exactly," said Hugh; "and I'm glad you listened so carefully and understood so well. Now, of course, if we couldn't find sticks with the branches just right, as those two sticks had, we might have to cut a notch in the float-stick, or we might have to try to bind the chain to it in some way or another. But there's work enough about beaver trapping at best, and if you can find the right kind of sticks, always better use them."

In the pine timber there were plenty of dead young trees, from which they selected four which made good float-sticks.

"I don't know, Hugh," said Jack, as they were hanging the sticks on their saddles, "just why you take a dry stick."

"Well," said Hugh, "there are two or more reasons for that. In the first place the beaver, if they happen to find the dry float-stick, are less likely to try their teeth on it than they would be if the stick were green. If you used a green cottonwood or willow or birch stick for your float-stick, very likely the beaver might carry it and your trap off into deep water before they got near the trap. Besides that, if a trapped beaver dives for deep water and manages to pull up your float-stick and it floats away, a dry one will float higher than a green stick and will be more easily seen and recovered."

"Yes, I see," said Jack. "That's plain enough. I

suppose that you kept your hands under water so much in order to wash away the human scent."

"Yes," said Hugh, "that is so. There are lots of men who will never hold the trap or the bait-stick or anything connected with the trap, so that the wind will blow from them to it. They believe that the human scent will stick to anything, and that the beaver can smell it. I don't go quite as far as that, but I do know that if there were a hard breeze blowing I'd always get to the leeward of the trap and of all the things I left near the trapping ground."

"Well," said Jack, "I wondered as I saw you setting those traps to see how awful careful you were about everything you did."

"Well," said Hugh, "I suppose that's habit, but it's necessary. You take a man that is careless, and that leaves sign about everywhere, and you'll find that he never catches any fur. I have been out with men of that kind, and they were always poor trappers."

As the two started on Jack looked at the sun and asked, "Do you know what time it is, Hugh?"

"About noon, I guess," said Hugh.

"I guess so, too," said Jack, "and just think, it's taken us a whole morning to set two traps."

"Yes," replied Hugh; "it has taken a long time, and we'll be lucky if we get two or three more set before it's time for us to turn back to camp, but in two or three days you'll find that things will run along a good deal smoother and we won't have to take quite so much time as we have to-day."

They went on up the stream, keeping well back from it, but occasionally, where there was an opening in the brush, riding out to the bank. A mile or two further on another dam was found with a pond smaller than the one below, and immediately above this the rise of the valley was sharper so that the stream was swift and shallow.

After they had left the horses and were prospecting along the bank for a place to set, Hugh pointed out to Jack a slide from the grassy bank down into the water, which he said had been made, not by the beaver, but by an otter. "Sometime," he said, "we may try to catch that fellow. We're not rigged for it to-day, and I guess we'd better stick to beaver." At a little point near the head of the pond on the east side Hugh set another trap just as he had set the two previous ones, and then going to the head of the pond they crossed over and set another on the west side. Here the main current ran close under the bank, and Hugh was obliged to build up a little bed of stones and gravel on which to rest his trap.

"You see, son," he said, "you must have your trap so near to the top of the water that when the beaver makes a kind of a dive with his foot to raise his head up close to the medicine on the bait-stick, he will strike the pan of the trap with a foot and so spring it. Sometimes, if the water is a little deeper over the trap than a man thinks is just right, and he hasn't any way of building up a firm bed for the trap to rest on, he will take a stick and thrust it into the bank, pointing out level into the water about two inches below the surface. The beaver, swimming along toward the medicine, will hit this stick and it will stop him, and then when he makes a strong effort with his foot to get over it he will sink his foot so deep under water as to hit the pan of the trap.

"There," he said, as he backed away from the last trap set. "Now let us walk up the stream for a little way, and then go out of it and around to the horses. I have always thought that if a man takes reasonable care in setting his traps there is more danger that the beaver will notice where he's gone in and out of the stream than there is of their suspecting something about the trap. Of course you've got to be careful

always in setting, but I've always had an idea that when a beaver gets the scent of the medicine in his nose he becomes so intent on that that he doesn't notice other signs right about the trap."

They kept on up the stream for quite a little way, and then leaving it, went around to their horses again. Hugh looked at the sun as they mounted, and said, "We have lots of time to get back to camp, and I think it might be worth while for us, on our way back, to go down to the two traps we set below. We might easily have something in one of them, seeing how tame these beaver are, and how they seem to be out all day long."

On the way back, they stopped as suggested, but only went near enough to the bank of the stream to see that neither trap had been disturbed, and then returned to camp. Half an hour was spent in stretching the lion's skin that Jack had killed the day before, and while they were at work at this Hugh said, "There seem to be quite a lot of lions in this country, son, and it's worth while to kill one every chance we get. We might run across a camp of Utes down here, and the Utes, like all other Indians that I know anything about, think a great deal of lion's skins. The chances are that you could trade this skin for three or four good beaver, and of course those would be worth a great deal more than a lion's skin, which is good for nothing except to look at. The Indians, you know, like lions' skins to make bow cases and quivers. I have often thought that maybe they have the same idea about the lion's skin that they do about the feathers of hawks or owls."

"How do you mean, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Why," said Hugh, "you know that the Indians think a great deal of all the birds that catch their prey; that is, the eagles, hawks, and owls; they value them and their feathers in war, and they think that

wearing those things helps them to be successful in war. I suppose the idea is that as the hawk or the eagle is fierce and strong and successful in attacking his enemies, so they, if they wear his feathers, will be fierce and strong and successful. In other words, they think that the qualities of the bird will be given to them if they have about them something that belongs to the bird.

"Well, now, here's a mountain lion; he is cunning and cautious, creeping about and scarcely ever being seen, able to catch his prey and hold and kill it with his sharp claws and his strong teeth, and maybe the Indians think that if they have about them something that belongs to him they will also have some of his qualities."

"Jerusalem, Hugh," said Jack, "I like to hear you tell about what the Indians believe, and why they believe it. I wonder if most men who have seen much of Indians understand as well as you do how they think about things. Of course, it's fun to hear you tell about their habits and what they do, but it's better fun yet to hear you tell about how they think about the different matters of their living."

"Well, son," said Hugh, "I've talked a heap with Indians about all these matters, and I do like to hear how they feel about them. I guess maybe there are lots of other people feel the way you and I do; but most of the old-time hunters and mountain men didn't think about much of anything except gathering a lot of fur and then going in and selling it, and getting their money and spending it as quick as they could, and then starting out to get more fur.

"I mind that once your uncle, when I was telling him some story about Indians, said to me, 'The proper study of mankind is man,' and when I told him I thought so, too, he said that that was something that some poet said a couple of hundred years ago."

"Well, I guess it's so, Hugh," said Jack, "no matter who it was said it."

When the panther skin had been stretched, Hugh told Jack to put around it the same protection that they had stretched about the grizzly bear skin, and soon after this had been done supper was ready. The dishes were washed before the sun had set, and building up the fire, the two companions lounged about it with the comfortable feeling which follows a day of hard work. For setting traps, although it does not sound like very hard work, had really required a good deal of effort.

"Now, son," remarked Hugh, "we want to get started to-morrow morning in good season, and we ought to be on our way before it's plain daylight. Of course, I hope that we'll find a beaver in every trap, but it may be that we won't find anything but feet."

"How do you mean, Hugh? Is it so that the beaver will gnaw their feet off to get out of a trap?"

"Not so," said Hugh. "I don't reckon a beaver knows enough for that in the first place, or could do it in the second. A beaver's foot is made up of a whole lot of pretty strong bones, and I question whether even a beaver could cut through those bones, and then he wouldn't know enough to do it. All a beaver knows when he gets caught is to struggle, and pull, and twist, and turn, and try to get away. Very often, if the traps are not properly set, they do get away, leaving their feet in the trap, but they don't gnaw their feet off; they twist them off. That is something that can be done and often is done, and that's the reason, as maybe I've told you before, that we always try to set our traps so that a beaver as soon as he gets caught, will plunge into deep water, and will be held there by the trap until he drowns. Then he has no opportunity of fighting with the trap and trying to get free. Of course, it often happens that it isn't

possible to set your traps so that your beaver will drown, and where that isn't possible, you are likely to lose a good many of the beaver that you catch. It used to be a common thing to catch beaver with only three feet, sometimes with only two, and I once caught one that had only one foot, a hind foot that he got into the trap."

"I should think, Hugh, that a beaver that had been caught once and had got away would be mighty hard to catch again."

"Yes," said Hugh, "that's so, of course. He's always on the lookout for a trap, and then, too, if a beaver has lost a foot, a quarter of the chance of getting him is gone. If he's lost two feet he's only got two feet that can get into the trap, instead of having four, like an ordinary beaver. Lots of queer things happen in beaver trapping. I reckon I never told you that story of old Jim Beckwourth's about the beaver and the trap that was stolen by a buffalo."

"No," answered Jack. "That sounds as if it ought to be a queer story or a pretty good lie."

"Well," replied Hugh, "Jim Beckwourth had the name of being the biggest liar that ever traveled these prairies, but I wouldn't be surprised if he told the truth that time, and, anyway, Jim Bridger was with him when he found the trap with the beaver in it out on the high prairie a couple miles from where it was set.

"It seems, according to the story—it happened long before my time—that Jim came to a place where he'd set a trap and found that it was gone. There was sign there that some buffalo had crossed the creek just at this point. Jim hunted up and down the stream and couldn't find hair nor hide of the trap. The next day he and Jim Bridger went back again and looked some more, and not being able to find anything, they started on to join their party that was moving, and

followed the buffalo trail that led from the place where the trap had been set. They had gone a couple of miles out on the prairie when they saw something, and going up to it found it to be a beaver, still in the trap, with the chain and float-stick all attached. Jim always claimed that one of the buffalo when crossing the creek got his head tangled in the chain of the trap and carried beaver, trap, and float-stick away out to the prairie before dropping it. It's a good story, but I'd hate to swear to it or to anything else that Jim Beckwourth ever said."

"That is a good story, Hugh," said Jack. "Isn't it wonderful," he added after a pause, "what strange things happen out here on the prairie, but there are lots of them that people back East wouldn't believe at all."

"Well, of course," said Hugh, "we all of us measure things up by what we ourselves have seen and done, and when we hear about things that are outside of the range of our own experience, we think they're wonderful."

For an hour or two longer they sat about the fire chatting over various matters, and then on Hugh's repeating the suggestion that to-morrow morning they must be early afoot, they went to bed.

XV

THEY SKIN BEAVER

THE crackling of the fire was the first thing to rouse Jack next morning, and when he sat up in bed he saw that it was still dark, and that Hugh was at work cooking breakfast.

"Time to be astir, son," said Hugh, who had heard Jack's movement, and in a very short time Jack was dressed and down by the spring dousing himself with the cold water. The air was sharp and Jack crowded close to the fire, but soon a cup of coffee and some hot antelope meat warmed him up. The horses were brought in and saddled, and carrying the four traps on their saddles, and the ax, the two started up the stream. Dawn was beginning to show in the east, and before they had reached the first of the beaver traps the sun was up.

As they rode along after it got light, Hugh kept close to the edge of the willows and seemed to be looking for something, which presently he found. This was a willow sapling which forked just above the ground, sending up two sprouts to a height of twelve or fifteen feet. He cut the sapling off below the fork, cut off one of the main branches close to the fork and then trimmed the other branch, having thus a limber pole ten or twelve feet long with a stout hook on its heavier end. This he carried with him. When they left the horses he gave it to Jack, saying: "Pack this for me, son, while I carry the ax and a couple of traps."

They approached the stream by the same route that they had followed the day before, and when they had

come in sight of the place where the first trap had been, Hugh said, "Something has happened here"; and pointed to the stream just below where the trap had been set, where Jack saw one end of the float-stick projecting above the water.

"Well," said Hugh, "I reckon we've got to get back that trap of ours and see what there is in it."

When they had come opposite the float stick, Hugh put the ax in the water, and taking the long willow pole from Jack, reached out, caught the float-stick and pulled it in within reach of his hand, and he gave the willow back to Jack and began to drag the trap toward him. Almost at once he said to Jack, "Well, son, we've got a beaver, I reckon"; and a moment or two later, after hauling in the chain, he lifted the trap out of the water, and Jack saw the head and shoulders of a good-sized beaver.

"Now," said Hugh, "we'll go up and look at the other trap, and then set over again. These are pretty good places, and we might catch several beaver here."

As Jack passed the trap and the beaver, which here lay almost at the surface of the water, he looked down at it with the greatest interest, but there was no time to stop and examine it. Hugh was plowing along through the water toward the other point, and Jack could see the end of the float-stick of the trap there just sticking out of the water, and looking much as it had looked the day before, after the trap had been set. Hugh said nothing, but advanced to the point, and then motioned to Jack to give him the willow pole, with which he felt in the water near the base of the float-stick and after two or three efforts hauled in the trap, in which there was a beaver.

"Pretty good luck so far, son," said Hugh. "Now I am going to set this trap over again here, because that float-stick is firm and this is a rattling good place. Suppose you take this beaver and drag it down to the

place where we leave the creek, and then maybe take the other beaver down there, too. By the time you've done that, I'll have set the two traps, and then we'll take the two beaver out."

Jack took the dead beaver by a fore-paw and walked back along the shore. When he had reached the other trap, he tried to take the other beaver from it, but the springs were too stiff, and so he left it and went on down to the point where they were to go out of the water. As he looked back, he saw Hugh coming down to the trap in which the beaver was, and leaving the animal that he had been dragging at the edge of the water, he went back to Hugh, who by this time had freed the other beaver and was at work resetting the trap. Jack dragged this beaver down to the first one, and in a few moments Hugh had overtaken him, and they started across the meadow, dragging the beaver over the grass.

When they reached the horses one of the animals was put on behind each saddle and they started up the creek to visit the other traps. Here their luck had been equally good, and two beaver were taken from these two traps and the traps reset.

"Well, son," said Hugh, "if this sort of thing keeps up we'll have to bring a pack horse along with us to carry the beaver into camp. Now let us take all four of these animals up into that pine timber over there and skin them and save ourselves the trouble of carrying them to camp. If we need any of the meat we can take that down, of course."

"It looks to me, Hugh," said Jack, "as if the skinning of these four beaver was going to be quite a job."

"Well," said Hugh, "so it will. I didn't suppose that we'd get more than two to-day, and figured that we would take them down to camp, but after this I think it would be a good idea for us to carry our skinning knives and whetstones with us."

"Our skinning knives, Hugh?" questioned Jack.

"Why, we've both got our skinning knives in our belts now."

"Yes," said Hugh, "that's so, but those are not the best kind of knives to skin beaver with. They're all right when you are skinning game where you make wide sweeps, and do a lot of stripping; but where you've got to naturally whittle a hide off, as you have to do with a beaver, and at the same time have to be mighty careful not to make any cuts, a smaller, shorter knife is better. It is easier to handle, and you can work more quickly with it. I'll show you the knives we'll use when we get back to camp to-night. Now, if you've got such a thing in your pocket as a jack-knife, and I'm pretty sure you have, you better get that out, and we will look for a couple of whetstones as we go along."

They loaded the two additional beaver on their horses, and walked, leading them.

After they got out away from the bottom, Hugh stopped three or four times and picked up several stones, most of which he threw away, but at last he seemed to find two that suited him.

They had gone some distance from the place where the last beaver were captured, when, at the edge of a little piece of pine timber, Hugh stopped and said, "Here is a good place, son, to tackle this job; throw down those beaver that are on your horse and drop your rope, and we'll let the horses feed while we work."

The beaver were drawn off to one side, and then Hugh gave Jack one of the stones that he had picked up and explained to him how to whet the blade of his jack-knife so as to get a keen edge on it. Then the toil of beaver skinning began. It seemed to Jack pretty slow, and he had no more than half finished his first beaver when Hugh threw the hide from his to one side and pushed the carcass away.

Jack, however, finished his beaver before Hugh had

finished the second one, and the two worked together on Jack's second beaver, and when they started back they had a couple hours' daylight yet before them.

"Now," said Hugh, "we'll stop and get some willows on our way back to camp and stretch these hides to-night. Then we'll be able to start in fresh in the morning. If you ever let this work pile up on you, your troubles begin sure. I'd rather skin all night than leave one beaver over till next morning."

After they got into camp that night, Hugh gave Jack a lesson in making the hoops on which to stretch the pelts; and the fur that they had taken during the day was hung up in one of the trees to dry. Jack looked at the stretched beaver skins and thought that they seemed like great furry shields, only that they were about four times as big as any shield that he had ever seen.

Jack was tired that night as he sprawled on the ground by the fire, and it did seem to him as if everything in camp smelled of beaver. He said to Hugh: "I wish there was some way of getting rid of this smell of the beaver and the beaver grease."

"Oh," laughed Hugh, "you haven't got used to it yet. If you don't like the smell of beaver grease you'll never be a real trapper. That's what the trapper lives in, and after a while he gets so he likes it. If you are going to handle beaver and skin beaver, you can't help but smell of them."

"Well," said Jack sleepily, "I think it's a pretty high price to pay for the fur."

"Well," replied Hugh, "try it a few days, and if you don't like it better, why, we can quit trapping and turn to something else. I noticed to-day along the creek, son," he went on, "a lot of mink tracks. Now, of course, mink isn't worth much of anything. Not much more than muskrat, but it's fur all the same, and if you feel like it we can make a few dead-falls and

get some mink. They ought to be pretty good here, close to the mountains."

"You catch them with dead-falls, do you, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Yes, the mink is a pretty simple-minded animal, and he'll go into 'most any kind of a trap. We ought to have some fish or bird for bait, though. I suppose maybe we could get some suckers out of this creek, but I guess the easiest way would be to kill one of those birds that you showed me the other day."

"Oh, no, Hugh," said Jack, waking up, "don't let's do that; they're all breeding now, and it would be a pity to break up a family. Wouldn't mink go into a trap baited with beaver meat?"

"Maybe," answered Hugh; "I never heard of anybody using that for bait. We'll get something, though, and catch a few if you like, but if the beaver are going to act as they did to-day, why, they'll keep us busy for a little while. To-morrow, if we get time, I want to go round on the other side of that pond and set a couple of traps there, and then come down below and set two traps there. We've got eight traps, and they might as well all be in use."

"Well," said Jack, "I can imagine beaver getting too thick. I am surely going to buck if this trip comes down to just plain beaver trapping."

"Well, don't make up your mind in too much of a hurry, son," said Hugh. "You'll be able to use your hands a little better after two or three days' practice, and I am sure you'd like to take a nice pack of beaver back East to show to your friends."

They went to bed early that night, but again next morning Hugh had Jack up before dawn. He was rested now, and felt more interested in the work of trapping than he had the night before. The two got away from camp before sun-up, and on visiting their traps again found that each one contained a beaver.

Hugh showed Jack how to set a trap, and Jack readily learned that it was knack rather than strength that was required to compress these powerful springs. The work went on a little faster than it had the day before.

They took the beaver over to the same place and skinned them there. Before they reached it, however, Hugh said to Jack, "Look out, son, something has been here interfering with our pile," and sure enough when they got to the place they saw that two of the beaver had been dragged off down the ravine. Following the trail a little way, it appeared that three bears had found the carcasses and had made away with two of them. The tracks showed a good-sized grizzly and two quite small cubs.

"Well," said Hugh, "I don't care very much to be feeding these bears, but it's less trouble for us to skin here than to carry the beaver to camp. Now these bears are our meat, son, if we want them. We can build a trap and catch the old one, or we can come here and sit around and watch for them, and kill them with our guns. I am inclined to think that would be the better way, because it's a whole lot of trouble to build a bear trap, and we haven't got the tools, and we haven't got the timber right here. At least," he said, looking around, "no such timber as I would like."

"Well," he went on, "let's skin our beaver and then to-morrow we'll see what has happened."

To-day Jack found that skinning a beaver was much easier than it had been yesterday. He learned how to grip and turn over the hide, and how to make his knife strokes longer and more effective. This day Hugh had not forgotten to bring the little skinning knives of which he had previously spoken. It was not yet noon when the work of skinning was ended and they had wiped the grease off their knives and hands and tied the bundle of fur behind one of the saddles.

"It goes better to-day, son, doesn't it?" said Hugh.

"Why, yes," replied Jack; "that wasn't such very hard work. I could skin another beaver and not mind it greatly."

"Well," said Hugh, "instead of doing that let us go out here and cross the creek and go down on the the other side and set these other traps. Do you want to take any of this meat along? There's one young beaver there that might be good and tender, but as far as I'm concerned, I'd just as soon have antelope meat."

"So would I, Hugh," said Jack. "But now look here, I'm thinking about those bears. Can we not fix this meat here in some fashion so that they can't carry it away, or if not that, can't we fix it so that it will give some trouble, and they'll make more sign than they did yesterday?"

"Why, yes," said Hugh, "we can stake it down and maybe that will make them stop and eat it here. We can hang it up in a tree, and that will make them stay around here and get them used to the place."

Jack smiled at Hugh's joke, and then proposed that they should hang one of the beaver up in a tree out of reach of the bears.

Hugh agreed, and Jack climbed up into the pine tree, where Hugh threw him a rope by which he hauled up the carcass of a beaver, which he hung over a limb in such fashion that it could not be shaken out by the wind.

"There," said Hugh, "I reckon before we get through we'll have those bears regularly wonted to this place, but I'd rather not shoot at them, or fire any guns until we have finished our trapping."

"Well," said Jack, "we can be pretty sure that the bears won't go away as long as we leave something for them to eat here every day."

"No," said Hugh, "they won't leave the place as long as there's food."

"Do you know, son," he went on, "what the best

thing in the world is to drag, if you want to make a trail around a trap to bring a bear to it?"

"No," said Jack, "what is it?"

"Why, it's a beaver. I don't know whether it is that bears are especially fond of beaver, or whether its just the strong smell, but if you take a beaver carcass and drag that, every bear that crosses the trail will follow it up. We'll have to try that in case we set a bear trap anywhere,"

"Why, Hugh," replied Jack, "that's just what a wolfer told me on the boat that year we went to Benton; or at least he told me a beaver made the best kind of a drag for wolves."

"Well," said Hugh, "he told you true."

Mounting, they rode to the stream, and crossing, followed it down on the west bank.

Hugh set two more traps in the pond where they had taken the last beaver, and on the west side of the pond below he set two, and in another pond still lower down, two more, near its head. Now all the eight traps were set.

As they rode back to camp, Hugh said to Jack, "I'm beginning to feel sorry for you already, son, for you're liable to have a day of pretty hard work to-morrow. If we should get eight beaver, I reckon you'd think you had your hands full. Besides that, I'm beginning to feel a little touch of rheumatism in my right arm, and I don't know whether I'll be able to use a knife to-morrow or not. This wading around in the water, even in rubber boots, isn't good for a man as old as I am."

Jack looked hard at Hugh to see whether he was joking or not, and did not answer, but looked away, and then quickly looking back again caught the twinkle in Hugh's eye, which told him that his friend was just making fun of him.

"Tired to-night, son?" said Hugh, after supper

had been eaten and they were comfortably sitting by the fire.

"No, Hugh," replied Jack, "not as tired as I was last night."

"Well, son, you've heard lots about the old trappers and the life they led, and how full it was of danger and excitement, and maybe romance, but this thing that we're doing now is just about the old life, except that we don't have to keep our guns in our hands all the time, and our eyes peeled for Blackfeet. The old trapper got up in the morning, went to his traps, set them, brought in his fur and skinned and stretched it, and then went to bed and slept. Of course, every little while he killed a deer or a buffalo to eat, but most of his life was hard work, and all he got for it was money enough to buy powder and lead and traps for his next season's work, and a few days or a week or two of what he called a good time at the post. They say cow punching is hard work, but I don't believe any man ever worked harder than the trapper of the old days, and he was always in danger of being rubbed out. I tell you that these ranchmen and cowhands nowadays that are always bellyaching about how hard they have to work, have a mighty easy time, and don't you forget it."

"I guess that's so, Hugh. I guess a good deal of those wonderful good times that we think other people have, exists only in our imagination."

"You bet they do," said Hugh. "Now, fur is good, it brings money and we all like to have it, but I tell you it's like every other thing in this world, it's got to be paid for. If you go into a store back East and want to buy beaver skin, you've got to pay so much money for it. If you want a beaver skin here you've got to start out, find where there are beaver, splash around in the water setting your traps, skin and stretch your beaver hide, and then carry it back in to the rail-

road. The price you pay for a beaver skin back East isn't very much, considering all the work that's been done before that beaver skin came into the store of the man that sells it to you."

"I never thought of it just in that way before, Hugh," said Jack. "I know I've heard people in the East grumble because furs were so expensive, but, of course, those people didn't know any more than I knew what it cost to get them."

"No," said Hugh, "I reckon they didn't, but if you think about it you'll see that I'm right. Every good thing has got to be paid for by somebody.

"Well, now, we'd better go to bed," Hugh went on, "and to-morrow when we go to our traps, I think we'll take a couple of pack horses. We may have good luck, and if we should get five or six beaver, they will be more than we'll want to pack on our riding horses. In fact, I don't know but that we might as well separate, and one go up on each side of the creek, looking at the traps; do you suppose you could set some of these traps yourself?"

"I don't know," said Jack, "I think I understand the theory of it all right, but whether I can really do it is a question; and besides that, we've only one bottle of beaver medicine."

"That's so," said Hugh. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll make an early start and look at the traps together, and I'll have you set them all, and then we'll go and skin whatever beaver we have taken."

"I guess that will be better," said Jack.

The next morning they picketed one of the pack horses and took the other two with them. The horse left in camp was uneasy, and long after they got out of sight they could hear him neighing for his companions, but it grew light before long, and just before they turned into the stream bottom, Jack rode up on a little knoll from which the camp could be seen, and on

his return reported to Hugh that the horse was feeding contentedly enough.

They crossed the stream to the west bank, and to Hugh's great satisfaction found that each one of the traps on that side held a beaver. These they loaded on one of the pack horses, and then crossing the stream at the head of the upper pond, they found two more beaver. As they passed the various traps, Hugh had Jack set them, explaining again the importance of keeping the human scent away from the traps and from the bait-sticks, and showing him that washing in water was the best way to get rid of that scent. "If you have to handle anything above water," said Hugh, "do it with gloves on and see that these gloves are often smoked on the outside. That will kill the scent." After they had crossed the stream, Hugh said, "Now, suppose I go up to our skinning ground and go to work on these beaver, and you take this other pack horse and go on down and lift the other traps. You ought to be able to set them, and if you happen to find anything in them you can get it out to where the pack horse is and put it on him and bring it up here. You see we have six beaver now, and it's going to take quite a little while to skin them, and I'd better be busy at that than wasting an hour to go down to these other traps."

"Yes," said Jack, "I think I can manage all right. Anyhow, I'll try. I think I've got clearly in my head just how the traps ought to be set."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I reckon you have. If I were going down with you, I would move those traps a little bit, but perhaps you had better not try that; but do as you like about it. Anyhow, get back as soon as you can."

The morning had only half passed when they parted, and half an hour later Jack had taken two beaver from the other traps and was struggling with the

problem of setting them. It was not very easy to do this alone—not nearly so easy as it had been when Hugh was by to make a suggestion to him if he began to do something in the wrong way. However, he set both traps, but had some difficulty in thrusting the float-stick of the lower one into the bottom. He remembered in dipping the bait-stick into the medicine to hold the stick close to its sharpened end, and not to touch any portion of it that was to stand above water with his hand or his clothing. After the traps had been set, he dragged the two beaver over the meadow to where the horse stood, and fastened a sling rope about the neck of one of the beaver, and the other end of the rope about the root of its tail, and then pulling steadily and evenly on the ropes from the other side of the pack horse, he raised first one and then the other beaver up on the saddle and lashed them firmly there. Then with the animal's hackamore in his hand, he mounted and rode to join Hugh.

Hugh was found sitting cross-legged on the pine needles, and hard at work. Already he had stripped the skin from one beaver, and another was almost finished.

"Hello," said Hugh, "we're surely in great luck to-day. If this was in old times, I'd say we would have to look out for Indians to-night. So much good luck is likely to be followed by some that is bad.

"Say," he went on, "we haven't time to look around much now, but after we get through skinning these beaver I want you to see what the bears did here last night. They regularly cleaned up all the meat we left here, and one of them has been up that tree trying to get at the carcass that you hung up there."

Jack dropped his load off the pack horse and pulled the beaver over near to Hugh, and while he did so he was looking at the tree and could see the scratches on the bark where some animal had climbed up.

"But, Hugh," he said, "they are grizzly bears, and I thought that grizzlies never climbed trees."

"Well," said Hugh, "the big ones don't. I reckon it's because they're too heavy and their front claws are too long, but the little fellows can scramble up a tree pretty well, and often do. Many a time I've come on an old bear with cubs and seen the young ones race up a tree while the mother footed it off through the timber."

"Then you think it was a cub that climbed up this tree?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "a cub, and a little one, too. If you look at the claw marks on the tree, you'll think the same thing."

"Well," said Jack, "we'll have to take these bears in, I guess."

"Yes," said Hugh, "we'll do that, and we can try it 'most any time. You see that little knoll over there on the prairie? By coming down that ravine beyond it, and creeping up to the edge of the knoll, we can get a shot at them any time, if they are here."

"So we can," said Jack. In fact, whether by accident or by Hugh's choosing, the position was a strategic one. A ravine led from the upper prairie to the stream bottom, and just above it was a high, rounded knoll, only a short rifle shot from where they were sitting.

"Have you any idea, Hugh, about what time the bears come here?"

"No," Hugh responded, "I haven't; but judging from the way all game here acts, they ought to be right tame, and to be about any time of the day, except about midday when the sun is hot."

"Well," asked Jack, "what's the matter with trying them to-morrow morning before we got to the traps?"

"No harm in it at all," said Hugh; "but if we should get one or two bears and four or five beaver, it

would give us a whole day's hard work, but then if we get too tired we can rest the next day."

"Well," Jack suggested, "we might try the bears to-morrow, and then go to the traps, and let whatever luck we have determine what we'll do next day."

"All right," said Hugh; "say we do."

After a pause, he went on, "As we were saying the other night, son, we don't want to make a labor of this trip. We've got sixteen beaver now in three days; they ought to be worth fifty dollars, and I don't know but that we've stayed here about long enough. If we should make another good catch to-morrow, we might pack up as soon as our fur is dry enough and go along further. Of course, I reckon that by staying here and working hard, we should get three or four hundred dollars' worth of fur out of this stream. You can see we haven't half gone over it yet; we haven't touched that big pond down below where there must be plenty of beaver. But as I said before, we are not out here to make a grub stake for winter."

"I think with you," said Jack, "that perhaps it would be just as well to move camp to some other place."

"Well," said Hugh, "we'll see what happens to-morrow."

And now for a while nothing was said, and the silence was broken only by the occasional whetting of a knife. Hugh peeled off the beaver skins pretty rapidly, and by this time Jack was becoming quite skillful. Nevertheless, the afternoon was well advanced before the last of the pelts was freed from its carcass and they were ready to go. The eight skins spread out on the ground made a fine showing.

"Notice that pelt, son," said Hugh, pointing to one of the hides that was very much darker than the rest. "It isn't often you see as good a beaver pelt as that. That one is worth any three of the others, perhaps any

four. Color counts for an awful lot in any fur, and it isn't often that you see one so nearly black as that one, though I've seen one or two." The pelt in question was not only very dark, but was peculiarly fine and silky, and on parting the hair, Jack saw that the fur beneath was also very dark.

"We'll have to take special care of that pelt," said Hugh. "It's valuable."

It was nearly sundown when they got to camp, and by the time they had finished supper, night was falling. Jack felt pretty tired, but no amount of exertion ever seemed to weary Hugh.

"Your muscles must be made of wire," said Jack. "Here am I nearly tired to death, and you seem just as fresh as you did this morning. I wish I could stand as much as you can."

"It isn't that I'm any stronger than other people," said Hugh, "but I'm doing work that I'm used to, and have been used to all my life; so it isn't as hard on me as if I were doing some new job. Now, if you were to sit me down by a table and make me write letters for two or three hours, I expect I'd get fearful tired, and yet I've seen your uncle sit down and write all day long, from morning until supper time at night, and it never seemed to tire him a bit. It's all in being used to your work."

"Yes," said Jack, "I expect there's a whole lot in that."

"Now, son," said Hugh, "if we're going to try those bears to-morrow we'll have to go up on the prairie and make a circle to get into that ravine, and then come down to the place we're going to shoot from. Of course, it may be that the bears won't be there, and in that case we'll just go on to our traps. We'll have to leave the horses somewhere up in the ravine, where they'll be out of sight, and then go back for them. Of course, if by any chance the wind should

be wrong, we won't see anything of the bears, but if it's right still, or if the wind is from the west, we may get a shot. I don't think we need to start out specially early, but, of course, we want to get there soon after sun-up."

It was quite light next morning when they rode up on the prairie and headed north to cross the ravine, from which they hoped to approach the bears, and the sun had risen some time before they reached it. From time to time they got glimpses of the stream valley, which showed them where they were, and at last Hugh turned to the left and rode down a little ravine which soon became deeper. Presently he stopped and said to Jack, " Son, you stay here with the horses and let me go ahead and look down at the stream, so that I can find out just where we are. I think this is the coulée we were looking for, but I'm not quite sure of it "; and he strode off down the gulch. A little later he came back, saying, " This is the place, and down here only a short distance is a clump of brush where we can tie up our horses." After leaving the horses, they went forward on foot, walking in the bottom of the ravine, whose high banks on either side concealed them, and as they approached the stream Jack began to recognize the different features of the landscape and knew just where their skinning ground was. Soon the little knoll that they had spoken of the day before came in sight, and there they left the ravine and walked toward the hill's crest. There was no wind, and Jack felt sure that if the bears were there they would get a shot. As they cautiously lifted their bared heads above the fringe of grass on the crest of the hill, they saw the place where they had been sitting yesterday lighted up by the clear rays of the newly risen sun. Under one of the trees was a tawny bundle, of which Jack could make nothing. He was only sure that it had not been there the day before, but a little

A Bear, Sitting on Her Haunches, Was Looking Almost Directly at Them.—*Page* 186.

to the right of this bundle was a bear sitting on her haunches and looking out down the stream and almost directly at them, and Jack heard Hugh whisper, "Better shoot quick, son, she's liable to see us any second. I'll take one of the cubs."

Jack slowly raised his rifle to his shoulder, but even his deliberate movement must have been seen by the bear, for she sprang to her feet just as he pulled the trigger, and he felt certain that he had scored a miss. At the instant that he fired, the bundle under the tree separated itself into two little bears, one of which instantly scrambled up the tree, while the other ran toward its mother. A shot rang out from Hugh's rifle, but Jack's eyes were fixed on the old bear and he could not see the result.

At Jack's shot, the old bear had started directly toward the crest of the knoll from which it had come, and Jack was astonished at the speed with which she approached. He slipped another cartridge into his rifle and fired again, apparently without effect, and again, but still the bear came on, and by this time she was not more than thirty yeards off, coming up the gentle slope at railroad speed.

Jack heard Hugh say, "Steady, son, steady. Keep your wits about you. Run off a few yards to your left and I'll go to the right, and let the next shot be plumb center." Jack made a couple of jumps to the left and whirled and again threw up his gun. As he did so he saw that the bear was running toward Hugh, who was at some little distance to the right. Jack fired well in advance of the bear's shoulder, and at the shot she fell to the ground, but instantly sprang to her feet and continued her course toward Hugh. She had come within two or three jumps of him when his rifle spoke, and the bear collapsed upon the prairie. Hugh had reloaded and sprung to one side and stood waiting. He called out to Jack, "Hold on a bit, son, don't go near her.

She is dead enough, but we'll give her time to finish dying." In a moment or two the bear gave a few convulsive struggles and stretched out her legs and was indeed dead.

"How came it you didn't stop her with your first shot, son?" said Hugh.

"Why," said Jack, "didn't you notice that she saw us and moved just as I fired?"

"Well," said Hugh, "she surely kept coming. I want to see where all those shots went, and why she didn't die quicker. Your last shot would have killed her in a short time, but she might have run fifty or sixty yards, and have torn up two or three men before she died. Let's look at her."

As they took hold of the animal to turn her over she did not seem very large, yet they found her so heavy that it was not easy to turn her on to her back, and they could not have lifted her from the ground. In the forehead, over and just inside of the right eye, the ball that had stopped her final rush had entered and had passed through the brain. Jack's last ball had struck her just behind the elbow, and had passed through the heart. A wound was found where a ball had cut across the belly just back of the ribs, and Jack concluded that this was his first shot. They could not find his other balls, but those, if they had hit her, would be seen when the bear was skinned.

"What became of the cubs, Hugh?" said Jack, as they arose from their examination. As he spoke, there was a scraping sound behind them, and turning their eyes toward the timber, the little bear that had been up a tree was seen to reach the ground and to disappear among the trees before there was time for either of them to pick up his rifle.

"Well," said Hugh, "that little cuss rather played it on us, didn't he? One of us ought to have gone down there and killed him—that is, if we wanted him

—of course, his hide wouldn't be of any special use; it's only that it sounds more like something to kill three bears than it does to kill two."

"Then you got the other cub, did you, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Yes," said Hugh, "he sort o' stopped to look when his mother began to run, and I killed him."

"Well," said Jack, "we've got quite a job on our hands now with two bears to skin and our traps to take up."

"Right you are," agreed Hugh, "we've got a full day's work. Now, what do you think? I believe the best thing for us to do is to take up these traps, skin these bears and whatever beaver we get, and then to move along?"

"Yes," said Jack, "I guess that's the best thing to do. As you said the other night, we didn't come out here to do hard work all summer, and it's certainly better fun to be traveling around than it is to be skinning beaver all day. We ought to get some more beaver on other creeks, I should think, but even if we don't, we've got enough to make a half dozen beaver robes."

"Well," said Hugh, "we don't want to be wasting any more time than we have to. Now, shall I sit here and skin this bear, and leave you to go and pick up the traps, or will you skin the bear and let me go for the traps?"

"Which do you think would be better, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Well, there's hard work enough in either job," said Hugh, "but I think if I were you I'd sit here and do the skinning, and let me go for the traps. If we get any beaver, there'll be quite a lot of pulling and hauling and carrying to do, getting the beaver and the traps both out and loading them onto the horses."

"All right," said Jack, "I'll go at this old lady at

once, then, and when you go back for the horses, bring Pawnee along and leave him here with me."

Jack got out his skinning knife and whetstone and at once set himself at the task of skinning the bear, while Hugh returned up the ravine, and before long came back leading the two pack horses and Jack's riding horse.

CHAPTER XVI

OFF FOR NEW TRAPPING GROUND

The morning seemed a long one to Jack, and the hide seemed to stick very close to the old bear. As the day advanced, the sun broiled down hotter and hotter, while Jack cut and pulled and sweated over the carcass, and seemed to make very slow progress. Gradually, however, the hide fell away more and more from the flesh, until it only clung to the body under the line of the back. Jack worked as far under the body on either side as he could, and then pushing the carcass over, freed the hide from it almost everywhere, except under the shoulders. Try as he might, he could not lift the body so that he could make the final cuts here. At last, however, it occurred to him to call his horse to his aid, and tying his lariat about the forelegs of the bear, he took a turn of it about the horn of his saddle and started Pawnee away, dragging the carcass a few feet to one side, and then leaving his horse standing there to hold the carcass in position, he went back and with a few more cuts separated the hide from the carcass, and then dragged the latter off the hide. It had been a hard job, and Jack was covered with bear's oil and perspiration, but he felt that it would not do to stop here, so turning the bear's hide flesh side down upon the grass, he went down to where the cub lay. First, however, he looked to see where the balls had gone from the other shots that he had fired at the bear. One of them he found slightly imbedded in the muscles of the foreleg, but there was no trace whatever of the other, which must have been a clean miss. He could hardly believe that a ball from his powerful gun would

have stopped and flattened on the muscles of the bear's leg, as he found this one had done, but the evidence was plain there under his eyes.

The work of skinning the little bear was trifling, compared to the labor that he had put on the old one. Its skin was thinner and its fat softer, and it took him only about an hour to get the hide off. When he had done this, he took it up and spread it out by the old one.

He was just about to get on his horse and ride up to the top of the bluff to see whether he could see anything of Hugh, when down in the valley below him he heard a sound of breaking sticks and crushing undergrowth, and a moment later, to his amazement, a little bunch of buffalo broke out of the willows, raced across the valley, plunged into the stream, crossed it, and, with the activity of cats climbed the bluffs and disappeared. There were five of them, two old cows with their calves, and another that looked like a heifer. At no time had they been within easy rifle shot, and as a matter of fact, Jack was so astonished at their appearance that he did not think of shooting. Afterward he was very glad that this had been so, because at that distance he might well enough have wounded an animal which he could not afterward recover. Besides that, they did not need the meat.

Before he had recovered from his astonishment at the appearance of these buffalo, Jack saw Hugh approaching, and he saw that each of the pack horses that followed him had a load, and when he saw it Jack almost groaned at the thought of having to do more skinning. When Hugh had come close, Jack mounted and they rode over to the place where they usually did this work, and on unloading the pack horses it was seen that there were six beaver.

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "it seems to me we're having a little too much luck."

"More than you bargained for, eh, son?" said Hugh with a smile. "Well, it's certainly a fact that everybody in this world has got something to growl about. It's either not enough, or the wrong kind, or sometimes it's too much. Now, suppose I'd told you before we left the ranch that we'd get more beaver than you would feel like skinning; I guess you would have laughed at me a little, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would!" exclaimed Jack. "We've got to learn about all these things by having them happen to us, I suppose. I never would have believed that we could catch more fur than we wanted."

"No," said Hugh, "I reckon not."

"Well, at least," said Jack, "I've got the skin off both these bears."

"So I see," replied Hugh, "and you did mighty well. I didn't suppose you'd have skinned more than one of them; in fact, I didn't feel sure but that the old one would tire you out, and I might have to help you when I got back. You stuck to that job well, son, and I'm glad you did."

It made Jack feel good to have Hugh say that, for he was not much accustomed to speak words of praise.

"Did you have any trouble with your traps, Hugh?" said Jack. "I thought you were gone a long time, but perhaps it was only because I got so tired of what I was doing."

"Well," said Hugh, "it took quite a while to make the rounds and to pick up the traps and get the beaver out, and then one of those traps you set yesterday wasn't very well fixed, and the beaver had pulled up the float-stick and got ashore on a mud bank, and got away, just leaving his paw in the trap. If we were going to stop here and trap for a while, you would see that that would make quite a difference in our trapping. That beaver will warn all the others in his pond, and maybe all the others in other ponds, and

they'll be a heap shyer from now on. Then there was one trap that hadn't been sprung. However, we've got six beaver, and it will take us till pretty near night to skin them; so we better start in and not spend any more time in chinwhack."

"Good enough," said Jack; "but I mean bad enough." In a few moments they were hard at work and before they had finished their task the sun had sunk close to the tops of the western mountains. The beaver skins and the traps were packed on one of the horses, and then taking the other pack animal up to the top of the knoll, Hugh tied his coat over his head. They made a bundle of the bears' skins and lashed them on the pack saddle. When they had finished, Hugh said, "Now tie up this rope, son, and let me start on with the other pack horse and you stay behind and watch this fellow. Likely he'll buck when we take the blind off, but after he gets tired he'll follow." Hugh mounted, holding the rope of the other pack horse, and then riding up to windward of the blinded horse, took his coat from its head and rode on. The horse started quietly enough, until a turn in the trail carried to its nostrils the scent of its load. When it realized that the hateful thing that it smelt was on its back it was panic stricken for a while, and began to try to get rid of it by bucking. But after tiring itself out by pitching and by running, first in one direction, and then in another, it followed the other horse toward camp. Jack, who had stayed behind it, had to do some riding from side to side to keep it from running off over the prairie, or up the stream. When they reached camp it was not easy to catch the pack horse, the more so because none of the other horses was willing to go anywhere near it, especially from the leeward side.

"Well," said Jack, after they had finally got the load off and turned the horses loose, "this business

of packing green bear hides on horses doesn't seem to be all that it is cracked up to be."

"It's always so," replied Hugh. "No horse likes to pack a bear hide, or rather no horse likes a bear or the smell of a bear. Of course there are some old plugs that will tote 'most anything, but these young horses haven't had experience enough to be willing to pack bears."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, that evening after supper, "we've got a day more to spend here, anyhow, for we've got to dry these hides."

"Yes," replied Hugh, "we've go to do that, of course. We'll do well if we get off the day after to-morrow." A little later Hugh said, "By the way, son, I saw tracks of a little bunch of buffalo down the creek to-day. I knew there were a few down here in these parks, and I thought maybe we might see some of them, but I didn't expect to run on them right here."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jack; "I meant to speak to you about that. I saw five buffalo to-day. They came out of the brush and crossed the creek right below where I was skinning the bear."

"You did, eh?" asked Hugh interestedly. "Were there two calves with them?"

"Yes," said Jack; "two calves and two cows, and I thought a heifer."

"That's the bunch," declared Hugh. "The tracks I saw were right fresh, and there were two calves and two cows and one smaller track. Now, I wonder where they came from. I reckon the fire must have driven them out of the mountains, and they must have crossed over and got into the brush below here, and just been working up the creek, sticking to the timber all the time. You know, these buffalo down here are what mountain men call bison, that is, they're buffalo

that live in the timber. There used to be lots of them all through the mountains."

"Are they just like the plains buffalo, Hugh?" asked Jack, "or are they different?"

"Well," said Hugh, "most people say they are different, but I never could see any more difference between them and the plains buffalo than there is between a mountain beaver and, say, a Missouri River beaver. These bison are darker and look to be a little heavier set than the plains buffalo, but I don't think that except for the color there is any great difference, and the difference in color is easily accounted for, because they live in the timber and don't get sunburned as the plains buffalo do, which are always out in the sunlight. Maybe we'll kill one before the trip is over, and then you can look at it and compare it in your mind with the buffalo you've seen on the prairie. I'd like to know what you think about it yourself."

The next day immediately after breakfast Hugh and Jack stretched the bear hide, and while Hugh went over it with a dull knife and scraped from it all the fat that he could, Jack busied himself in stretching the beaver hides and hanging them up to dry in the shade. This work occupied them both till noon, and after dinner they sat about and rested, for now they had been hard at work for a number of days.

"I reckon, son," said Hugh, "that we'll not make a very long march to-morrow. We can't do anything toward packing our fur until morning, and likely enough we won't get started until about noon. Then, however, we can make a march that will at least take us to another creek. I've half an idea that the best place for us to go now is back to the Platte, and, perhaps, from there to the Michigan."

"What's the Michigan, Hugh—a place or a stream?"

"It's a creek," said Hugh, "and a good-sized one, that comes down out of the mountains from the east. There are some beaver on it. Maybe you'd like to stop there and trap."

"I don't know," said Jack; "but I've an idea that I've had trapping enough to last me for two or three days. Maybe I'll look at it differently, though, when we get on the Michigan."

The next morning Hugh looked at the bear hide and declared that he believed that by noon it would be set sufficiently so that they could take it up and pack it and move on, and that the last of the beaver hides could be handled in the same way. During the morning they took the beaver pelts that were already dry and folding them once made a pack of them, which, when tightly lashed, they covered with gunny sacking. These, with the first bear hide, were to make a top pack for one of the animals.

About the middle of the day the pins which held the bears' hides were pulled up, the hides folded over, and after the beaver pelts had been taken from the hoops and each one folded once, these were put together to make a second pack, which also was to go on top of a load. The hides were not dry, but could be spread out again at the next camp.

The morning had been dull and lowering and by the time their packs were made up and dinner eaten, a heavy mist was creeping down the mountainside toward the valley. Jack brought in the horses and saddled them all, and the work of packing was soon accomplished. By the time the little train was in motion a heavy mist was upon them, which sometimes was almost a rain.

To one who is used to travel on the plains or the mountains it makes but little difference whether the march is through rain or sunshine. If it rains, the traveler protects himself as well as possible, and goes

on his way as cheerfully as he can, consoled by a certain philosophy which may be only habit, or may be a disregard for discomfort which he knows is but temporary. If the sun is clear and bright, on the other hand, he is still more cheerful; but under no circumstances are his spirits greatly lowered. Men who have not had experience in life out of doors are likely to be depressed by a march through rain. One becomes more or less wet, and it seems hard not to have a house to go into to dry one's self. Tents have to be pitched on wet grounds, blankets are damp, meals must be cooked in the rain and are likely to be cold and wet, so that for one who is not used to outdoor life a rainy day is a real misfortune.

On the open prairie a low hanging mist makes objects at a distance look like something quite different from what they are. Antelope seen through fog appear as large as horses, and a coyote may be taken for a gray wolf. If the fog is confusing to the human being who rides through it, it is, sometimes, not less so to the game. Even the keen eyes of the antelope are sometimes deceived at such a time.

Jack was just riding over a low ridge behind the pack horses when over another ridge close at hand appeared two antelope cantering briskly toward him. They did not see him until they had come within a hundred yards, and then instead of turning and running away, they put on a burst of speed and ran directly in front of him, passing between himself and the last pack horse, and not more than thirty steps from him. Just as they were about to pass in front of him, Jack shouted at them and one of the two turned and ran directly toward him, crossing before his horse so close that it almost seemed as if the horse would run over it. Again Jack shouted just as the antelope was in front of him and the animal turned sharp to the right, and darted by him, going like the

wind. If his rope had been free Jack could have easily caught the antelope, or if his gun had been in his hand he could have touched it with the barrel.

Hugh did not loiter on the ride, but kept his horse going at a little jog-trot, and generally Jack kept the pack horses close behind him. By the middle of the afternoon the rain had ceased and the fog lifted, and when they rode down among the willows at the bottom of the Platte they were warm and dry again. The valley was plentifully dotted with feeding antelope. After a camp had been made Jack asked Hugh if it would not be well to kill something, for the last of the fresh meat had been consumed that morning, and unless something was killed they would have to eat bacon to-night.

Hugh agreed that meat was needed, and as soon as the horses had been attended to and the tent put up, he advised Jack to go off and get a buck, saying that he himself would attend to the hides and spread them out to dry for the few hours of daylight that still remained.

Down below the camp there was a large group of antelope which were widely scattered out, so that the prospect of getting within range was not very good, but after a little careful maneuvering Jack found himself on the creek bottom with about thirty yards of level grass land to cross before he could reach the willows, under cover of which the herd might be approached. A single old doe was staring at him very intently, and he wished to wait until she should move out of sight. The other animals, however, were already beginning to feed toward the bluffs, and after waiting for a few moments he saw that if he was to get a shot he could delay no longer. He dropped on his hands and knees, therefore, and crept through the grass toward the willows. He was in plain sight of the doe, which continued to look at him, and he could only hope that she might take him for some animal

feeding in the bottom. There were numbers of cattle along the creek, and it was altogether possible that the antelope might take him for a cow or a calf. What he had hoped for happened, and before he had reached the willows he saw that the old doe was feeding once more. He crept carefully through the willows and got up close to a big buck. and feeling absolutely sure of it, threw up his gun to his shoulder and fired, making a clean miss, shooting well over the antelope. He was much mortified at his failure, so much so that he returned to camp depressed in spirit, and when Hugh asked him where his meat was he replied only by the Indian sign for "all gone," and did not speak until supper was ready.

After the dishes were washed up and they were sitting by the fire taking the comfort that follows a day's travel, Jack burst out, "Say, Hugh, I don't suppose you ever make a perfect fool of yourself; but did you ever do so when you were a young man?"

"Why, yes, lots of times, I expect, son," said Hugh. "What do you mean?"

"Why," said Jack, "this afternoon I crawled up within fifty yards of a big fat buck and had a standing broadside shot at him, and I thought the work was all done, except carrying in the meat, and when I shot at him the ball must have gone four or five inches above his back."

"How?" said Hugh. "I reckon I know how it was. You were so sure of him that you didn't take the trouble to sight your gun."

"Yes," said Jack; "I guess that's just about what happened. I never had any question but that I would kill him, and I suppose I was so sure I forgot to look at my sights."

"Well," said Hugh, "I guess that has happened to all of us at one time or another, but after it's happened a few times, we get to understand that you can't

hit things with a rifle ball unless you shoot straight every time."

"My! I felt cheap when I missed," said Jack. "It was not so much that I should have to come and tell you what a stupid thing I had done, but it was the change from being so sure and so confident that I had what I wanted, to seeing it slip through my fingers and skip off."

"Well," said Hugh, "I was astonished to hear your shot and then see you come into camp without anything, because, of course, I know as well as you do that usually you shoot pretty carefully, and you've been mighty lucky in your hunting. I sort o' fixed my palate for some fried antelope liver to-night, and it seemed like quite a drop to come down to bacon."

"Well, the next shot I fire," declared Jack, "you bet I'll take care and try to send the ball where it belongs. I don't want to have this thing repeated."

"Well," replied Hugh, "if you are going to shoot a rifle you've got to give it your attention first, last, and all the time. You never can be sure of hitting anything unless you keep your mind fixed on what you're doing. A careless man is neither a good hunter nor a good rifle shot."

"Well," said Jack, "you bet I'm going to remember that after this."

During the afternoon Hugh had spread out the green hides in his bundle and given them an opportunity to dry a little more, and then had repacked them, so that bright and early the next morning they were on their way again. Soon after noon they reached the crossing of the Michigan, and on the way there Jack got a shot at a fine buck antelope and killed it, and put the hams and sirloins on his horse. They made a pleasant camp in a grassy bottom of the Michigan, and after eating, Jack set out to walk a little distance down the creek in search of adventure.

While strolling along the bluffs overlooking the narrow river bottom, he came upon a little slough in and near which was several sorts of water birds. Of these the most interesting was a family of green-winged teal, an old mother, followed by eight tiny young. As soon as the old bird saw Jack she swam to the margin of the pool and ran off into the grass with the eight little ones strung out in a line and pattering over the mud behind her. The scene was a pretty one, and much as Jack would have enjoyed seeing one of the little fellows closer at hand, he did not go near the grass which she had entered, to disturb the small family. A little further down the river in a quiet pool he saw, a hundred yards below him, a duck swimming about in plain sight. Making a little round back from the water, so as to get out of sight of it, he crept up and tried to see the bird in order to find out what it was, but it had disappeared. Going on down the river, he happened to look back and he saw in the same place what seemed to be the same duck doing the same things. Again he went away from the water and returned to the place, and tried to see the bird, but again it disappeared. Jack wondered if it might not be one of the medicine birds about which the Indians had talked, a spirit which took the form of a bird and then, perhaps, changed into some other object of the landscape.

It was not nearly supper time when he returned to camp. He found that Hugh had spent the afternoon busying himself about the hides, and that these, except the bear's skin, were by this time all dried. Hugh declared that there was no reason now why they might not go on and make a full day's march, because the bear hide could finish drying at any time.

"If we're going into the mountains, son," said Hugh, "there is a good road into them not far from here. I don't know what game we'll find. Very likely nothing, except a few deer, or possibly, if we get up

high enough, a sheep or two, but anyhow I mind that it's a pretty country on the Michigan, and we might as well go up there as anywhere else."

"I would like to do it, Hugh, and if you say so, we will."

"Let it be so," said Hugh. "Now, son," he continued, "down here in the park is one of the greatest summer ranges for antelope that ever was, but we've got meat enough to do us for a few days, now, and unless you see something extraordinary in the way of a head, it seems to me I wouldn't bother with these antelope."

"No," said Jack, "I don't think it's worth while to, and I don't mean to. The only reason for shooting at them now would be to see whether I could hit them, and if I want to find out about that I can stick a chip up against a tree and shoot at it."

"That's right," said Hugh. "Of course, if you need an animal, kill it, but don't kill it just to gratify your curiosity or your love for hitting things."

After an early start next morning a hunter's trail was followed up toward the mountains. The way led through dense pine forests alternating with pretty, park-like openings, and some miles nearer to the main range they camped by some little springs. As Hugh had said, the antelope here were extremely abundant and very tame. In the timber there were many signs of deer, occasionally a snowshoe rabbit was seen, and more than one brood of blue grouse was startled from its feeding ground among the low brush. The young were about the size of quail, and after being flushed the first time lay very hard. Jack amused himself several times by getting off and walking in the direction which the birds had taken, and then finding them, one after another, crouched close to the ground, looking almost like so many stones or sticks and permitting him to come quite near to them before again taking wing.

The timber on the Michigan was burning in several places, but the rains of the past few days had for the most part extinguished the flames. Now only a few smoldering logs sent up their pillars of smoke through the still, clear air. In some places the fire had run down the mountains out onto the plain, burning the sage brush and sometimes even crossing the creek bottom, killing the willows which everywhere grew very thickly. In one place, as Jack was riding down the bluffs into the brush, a large bob-cat or bay lynx ran out from the bushes, stopped and stared at him when it saw him, but before he could draw his rifle from the scabbard it bounded back into the willows and was not seen again.

They had some trouble in crossing the Michigan where it came out from the mountains. The bottom was wide and level, and was full of old beaver meadows and ditches. Everywhere it was so thickly overgrown with willows that it was with difficulty that the horses could be forced through them. At every few steps they came upon mud holes, beaver sloughs, and other evidences of old beaver ponds, and it was necessary to wind about to avoid these obstacles. There are few things more troublesome and even dangerous than to ride through an old beaver meadow, for if one's horse gets fairly mired in a beaver slough it may be very difficult to get him out again.

Hugh and Jack spent more than two hours in crossing from one bank to the other, though the distance was only about half a mile.

A little beyond this they went into camp, but just before passing into the little park where they were to camp, Hugh stopped his horse and said to Jack: "There's a queer looking antelope; ride on ahead, son, and see if you can't kill it."

As he reached the edge of the little park, Jack stopped in the fringe of timber and looking through,

saw a half a dozen antelope scattered about feeding. The head of one of the bucks that was nearest to him had an odd appearance, and even looked as if it had two sets of horns. It was a good-sized animal, and Jack slipped from his horse, and creeping out to the edge of the timber, where he had a clear, open sight, raised his rifle to shoot. The motion caught the buck's eye and he turned about and stood facing Jack, looking at him. Jack drew a careful sight and fired, and the antelope reared up straight on his hind legs and then fell over backward. Jack reloaded, and going back, mounted and rode out to the buck, which he found dead, the ball having passed lengthwise through the body. The curious appearance of the animal's head was explained as soon as he reached it, for this buck actually had four horns; the two usual ones, and, growing from the skin behind each one, at a distance of a couple of inches from the horns, were two other stout, black horns about three inches long and an inch thick. These were not attached to the skull, but were mere outgrowths from the skin and moved about with the skin when it was moved.

Jack had seen nothing like this before, and he was very much surprised at it. While he was preparing the antelope to take into camp, Hugh and the animals came along and passed him, stopping at the edge of the stream not more than a hundred yards from where he was skinning the antelope. Jack stripped the hide from the beast, and, cutting off the skin of the neck low down at the breast and shoulders, placed the carcass across his saddle, and carrying the head in his hand, walked into camp.

The horses were already unpacked and feeding about, dragging their ropes, and Hugh had started his fire and brought the water. It took but a short time to put up the tent, and then to picket the horses.

"I want to tie up the horses for the present, son,"

said Hugh, "because here in the timber it's pretty easy for us to lose them. They may wander off only a short distance, but if they keep quiet in the brush or timber it may take us a long time to find them. It's different down on the open prairie, where you can see a long way." Each horse, therefore, was tied up, either made fast to a picket pin driven firmly in the ground, or to some stout tuft of sage brush.

After supper Jack brought out his antelope head and asked Hugh about it.

"Yes," said Hugh, "I've seen antelope like this before, but I don't know that I can explain to you why this fellow has these extra horns. I reckon they're something like the horns you'll often see on a doe antelope. Some does—maybe most of them—have no horns at all, but others will have a little knob of horn, perhaps not more than half an inch long, just sort o' capping the little bunch on each side of the head that corresponds with the big bony cores of the buck antelope's head; and others may have right long horns, maybe four or six inches long, with a little sign of a prong on the horn, but I've never seen a doe's horns that were firm on the skull and that had a bony core inside them as a buck's horns always have. The doe's horns always seem to just grow on the skin like these extra horns on this head. I have often seen buck antelope that had little, hard, black bunches looking just like the stuff the horns are made of, growing on the skin of the head somewhere near the horns, but I don't know what it means, no more than I know what it means when a rabbit has a horn or a pair of horns."

"What do you mean, Hugh?" said Jack. "Do rabbits ever have horns? I never heard of anything like that."

"Oh, yes," said Hugh; "sometimes they have horns, but I don't know why, nor do I know what the

horns mean. I've had rabbits with horns, both jack-rabbits and cottontails, shown to me a good many times."

"What!" said Jack; "real horns, you mean, growing out of the head like an antelope's horns or a cow's horns?"

"Well, yes, and no," said Hugh. "The horns look like real horns, that is to say, they seem to be made of horny matter, but they don't always grow on the head. Sometimes they grow on the neck, sometimes in the forehead. I've heard of cases where there were four or five growing on different parts of the animal's body. I never saw more than two on one animal, one of them grew out of the top of his head and another from the side of his neck."

"Well," said Jack, "that beats me entirely."

"This whole business of horns," said Hugh, "is something that, as I say, I don't understand. Now, of course, we know that a deer sheds his horns every spring or winter, and that an antelope sheds his horns every autumn, but, of course, the way an antelope sheds his horn is very different from the way a deer sheds his, just as an antelope horn is different from a deer's horn. I was talking about this with your uncle one time and he told me that the antelope was the only animal that had a bony core to the horn that regularly shed the horn, but, as I say, the antelope don't shed his whole horn, like the deer; the sheath that covers the horn core just slips off. When it slips off you find the core of the horn covered with skin and all over this skin grow long, white hairs, except at the very top, where there's a little black knob of horn. After the sheath has been shed, the skin and the white hairs covering it seem gradually to turn into the black horn, the change traveling down from the tip of the horn to the animal's head. Often at the base of the horn you can see where the hairs of the head join the horn

and seem to be mixed up with it. In other words, there's a place where the horn sheath is part horn sheath and part antelope skin and hair. Your uncle once told me that hair, horns, hoofs, scales, nails, claws, and feathers were all different forms of the same thing, and it seems to me that in the antelope's horn sheath and the way it changes from the time the old sheath is shed until the new sheath is formed we can see hair changing into horn."

"Of course, it's easy to see," said Jack, "that horn and nails and hoofs are the same thing; they are just the same substance put on different parts of the body. I can understand, too, how feathers are the same, because we can look at the quill of a feather and see that that isn't very different from the fingernail or the claw of a small animal, but scales seem to me a little different."

"Well, I don't know," said Hugh. "You take the scales of a beaver or a muskrat tail, and in places they're all mixed up with the hair, and the hair seems gradually to change into scales. Look at a beaver's foot and you'll see the same thing going on. Anyway, I guess if your uncle said that was so, it is so, for I don't think he's the kind of a man to talk positively about things that he doesn't know of."

"No, indeed, he isn't, Hugh, and he knows a whole lot, and yet, you'd never find it out unless you get talking to him and asking him questions about things."

"That's so," said Hugh. "He's a mighty quiet man, but he knows a heap."

XVII

TRAPPING THE MINK

THE next morning it was full daylight before the camp was astir, and the sun had risen before breakfast was over. Jack had brought in the horses and put the saddles on them, and they stood tied to the brush waiting for their loads.

Neither Jack nor Hugh seemed to be in a hurry, and after the packs had been pretty well made up, Hugh said, "Now, son, let us cut up this antelope and throw away the bones that we don't need and put the meat in a couple of sacks. No use to pack anything more than we have to, even if the horses are lightly loaded."

Accordingly they set to work and very soon had the meat stripped from the antelope's bones, cut into pieces of convenient size, and put in the sacks. The night had been cool and the meat had become chilled all through. While they were at work, the gray jays gathered about them in considerable numbers, hopping up within a few feet of them, and sometimes flying down close over the carcass. Occasionally Hugh and Jack would cut off a little piece of waste meat and throw it to one side, when it was instantly pounced upon by a bird and carried off. The fortunate one would be followed by half a dozen of his fellows, which would try to snatch his prize from him. So fearless were the birds that Jack took great pleasure in watching them and in throwing bits of food to them.

"You don't have the name of Whiskey Jack for these birds out here, do you, Hugh?" said Jack. "I have never heard it."

"No," said Hugh; "I've heard the Indians away

up north call them by a name that sounds something like that, but I reckon it's not the same name. The one I have heard is an Indian word—'Wis-kaysh-on.' Maybe the word you are talking of is only another way of pronouncing it. Out here we call them meat hawks and camp robbers. They're so cheeky that I always rather liked them, but they're a mean bird in winter, especially if a man is trapping marten; they will spring his traps, steal his bait, and maybe tear his pelts, but they are nowhere near as bad as the magpies, or even as the blue jays. It always amuses me to see how, after they have eaten what they want to, they will pack off all the food they can get and cache it in the trees, in the crevices in the bark, and in the moss that grows on the limbs. They are great fellows to hide things. Look at that one there," he went on, pointing, and Jack saw a jay picking up shred after shred of meat that had been thrown out, and noticed that the bird, instead of swallowing it, seemed to hold it in its throat. Presently it flew up into the branches of the pine tree, and after moving about a little, went to a bunch of the gray moss, and, after seeming to make a hole in it with its bill, deposited there the contents of its mouth and throat, and then flew back and began to gather more meat.

"Well," said Jack, "what do you suppose they do that for? Do they store up food in that way and go back to it when they are hungry?"

"You can't prove it by me," said Hugh. "I've an idea that they're just natural thieves and misers, and love to steal and hide things."

The work of loading the animals was soon finished, and they set out up the stream. The trail which they followed was a faint one and kept on the hillside on the north bank of the stream, always through heavy pine forests. There was little underbrush. The ground under foot was soft; the air was

fragrant with odors of spruce, pine, and balsam, and with the perfume of the many wild flowers that brightened the gloom of the dense woods with vivid colors of red, blue, and yellow. As they advanced, it was evident the snow had not been very long gone; the ground became more and more damp, little rills that trickled down the hillsides were full of water, and occasionally when an open spot in the timber gave them a view of the peaks toward which they were journeying they could see that they were still snowclad. Occasionally Hugh started a brown pine rabbit which hopped away from the trail far enough to avoid the horse's feet, and sat up on his haunches with his huge ears erect, watching the procession that passed before him with an air of meditation. Pine squirrels were everywhere, and their chattering was heard almost continually. Another familiar sound of the mountains was the shrill whistle of the mountain woodchuck, called from its cry, "whistler." It could not have been so very long since these animals came out from their winter homes, but they were now abroad and in full voice, and each one as he saw the train, or indeed as he saw any other unusual object, gave vent to his shrill cry. Altogether, the day's journey, while it lacked any especial incident, was one of very great pleasure to Jack.

Late in the afternoon they camped in a beautiful opening surrounded by giant spruces and firs, where rich grass stood waist high, and the steep sides of the mountains rose sharply from the narrow valley.

After camp had been made and supper eaten, Hugh said to Jack, "Now, son, I'm going up the creek a little way to see if I can see any sign of beaver or other fur. What are you going to do?"

"Well," said Jack, "I don't know; I think I'll go up this little valley through which this side creek comes and see whether I can see anything there."

"All right," said Hugh; "we'll get back here, then, before dark;" and they started on their different ways.

Hugh went slowly up the stream and before he had gone very far came to a place where the valley widened out and there were meadows on either side of the stream. Here was beaver work, and fresh. A dam across the stream held back the water until it was several feet deep, making a pond that was long and narrow, but not high enough to flood the meadows. Along the banks were willows on which the beaver had been working lately, and many freshly cut twigs and barked sticks were floating in the water. Hugh saw no beaver, but found abundant signs of them, and made up his mind that it would be well for them to stop here and trap for a day or two. There were mink sign along the stream, and at its head he saw fresh elk tracks, those of cows and calves. Going quietly through undergrowth he came at length to a place where the trees stood apart, and here suddenly he saw three cow elk, which a moment later saw him and crashed off through the trees, but at which he did not shoot.

Jack, on his part, had followed up the still narrower valley of the side stream. The mountains rose steeply on either hand, and to walk with any comfort he was obliged to keep either in the bed of the creek or close to it. On little sand bars by the stream he saw many tracks of small animals which he thought might be mink, and in one place where there was a deep pool he came upon what he believed to be the slide of an otter.

All along the stream dippers were feeding, the curious little slate-colored birds with which he had been so familiar in other parts of the mountains. Here they were as active as he had always seen them, flying up or down the stream or diving in the water or walking briskly about on the rocks, or, if for a moment they stayed in one place, making the curious bobbing

or dipping movement from which, perhaps, the name dipper has been given them. They were singing now with a sweet, clear note that reminded Jack somewhat of the robin's song.

From time to time Jack stopped to watch these little friends, and then went on. He moved as quietly as he could, and for the most part the babble of the stream drowned the slight noises that he made, but, as bad luck would have it, as he was rounding a point of the stream and had to make a long spring to cross the water, he caught an alder stem on the other side, and it came away in his hand with a sharp crack. Instantly there was a crash in the brush just above him on the stream, and as he turned his head he saw a good-sized bear plunge across the stream and disappear into the undergrowth. He had no time to whirl around, and still less to throw his gun to his shoulder, and yet he wanted to shoot. He ran twenty or thirty steps up the hillside as hard as he could to a little open place from which he thought he might possibly see the game, but nothing was visible save the undergrowth and the trees, and he was reluctantly obliged to come down the slope without seeing the bear. What made him feel the worse about it was that he felt that it was his own carelessness that had made the noise that had startled the bear. If he had kept on in his silent, stealthy way he might have had the shot.

Very much disgusted and disappointed, he turned about and went down the valley again, reaching camp just as Hugh got there.

"Well, son, what luck?" said Hugh.

"Bad," replied Jack. "I got quite close to a bear, and, not expecting any game, I made a little noise and he dodged off, giving me only a glimpse, at which I didn't have time to fire."

"That's bad," said Hugh. "A man always feels

worse if he knows that it was through some carelessness of his own that he missed a chance."

"Yes," said Jack, "that's what I was thinking only a little while ago. If I had done my best, and the wind had changed, or something had frightened the bear, I wouldn't mind it so much. What did you see, Hugh?"

"Well," said Hugh, "I found some beaver, and I saw a little bunch of cow elk. I expect there are calves hidden in the valley just above us, but they don't interest us much."

"No," said Jack, "we don't need any calf elk, certainly."

"I think, son," said Hugh, "we'd better stop here for a day or so and set some traps. We may get a few beaver, and there are some mink here, too."

"All right," said Jack; "I'll go you; but we haven't time to set the traps to-night, have we?"

"No," said Hugh, "we'll have to wait until to-morrow for that, but I'll tell you what we can do. We can start in to rigging our dead-falls for mink to-night. It'll take us some little time to fix them. We ought to have at least a half a dozen of them scattered up and down the creek here."

"Well," said Jack, "what do you want me to do? I'm ready for anything."

"Get the ax," said Hugh, "and we'll go up on the hillside and cut down some of these small, dead pines and get them ready for work to-morrow."

The two went up on the hill, and Hugh soon cut down a dozen slim, dead, young pines, not much thicker than his wrist at the butt, and trimmed the branches off. Jack taking a part of them on his shoulders and Hugh following with the rest, they carried them down to camp.

Here the butts of the trees were carefully trimmed and smoothed so that they were well rounded. Half

a dozen smooth, round sticks nearly as thick as the butts of the pine trees and about fifteen inches long were cut out for bed-sticks, and then a considerable number of sharp-pointed, stout sticks prepared. Then —for by this time it had become dark—Hugh explained to Jack at some length how these traps were to be set. "You see, son," he said; "as I have told you before, a mink is a pretty simple-minded creature. He hasn't much sense or keenness, and probably these mink here have never been trapped. We have got to rig the bait in these dead-falls so that a mink will come at it from the right end, and so that the log will fall on him and kill him. Now, we drive these sharp-pointed sticks into the ground, close together, in the shape of a V. The only way the mink can get in is to go through the open part of the V. Just inside of that open part we put down the bed-stick and on both arms of the V we leave out a stick or two so that the bed-stick goes through these open spaces, and it's down through these open spaces that the fall-log comes—in fact the sticks on either side of the open spaces are guides so that it falls square on the bed-log. The fall-log must be heavy enough so that it will come down hard and kill the mink at once. The bait is put on the end of a smooth spindle which supports the trigger-stick. When the animal passes in and pulls at the bait, he jerks out the spindle, the trigger-stick falls out of place and lets the fall-log down. The fall-log comes down onto the bed-log, and if the mink's there he's bound to be crushed flat. The success of the trap depends altogether on the speed with which the fall-log comes down. If it does not drop quickly the mink has time to see it coming and to get away. I reckon we'll have to use beaver medicine for bait for these traps; maybe put a little of it on some antelope meat or on some frogs if we can catch any."

"Well, Hugh," said Jack, "I expect this is all

right about the dead-falls, but I don't know as I understand just exactly how it's to be set, but I reckon if you will show me to-morrow I'll do what I can to help."

"Well, it's mighty simple," said Hugh, "and just as soon as you've seen it done once, you'll know how to do it. Now, we've got to fix some spindles and some trigger-sticks to-night, and I'm going to make one of each now, and after you've seen me do it you can take hold and make some yourself."

Hugh took out his jack-knife and began to whittle, and before long he had made a slender stick shaped not unlike a lead pencil and about eight inches long. It was round and smooth. Then taking a much thicker stick, one perhaps an inch in diameter, he smoothed this off, removing all bark, twigs, and inequalities, making it as nearly round as possible and pointing it bluntly at both ends. Then he took a bed-stick, put it on the ground between his feet, and laying the butt of the spindle upon it and at right angles to it, he placed upon the butt of the spindle the trigger-stick, and pressed it down on the spindle with his left hand. Then giving the spindle a little pull toward the bed-stick it slipped out from under the trigger-stick and the trigger-stick fell over. "There, son," he said, "do you see the philosophy of it now? Suppose my hand had been a heavy log and that it had fallen across the body of a mink, wouldn't it have killed him?"

"Yes, that's so, Hugh," Jack replied. "I think I begin to see now how the thing will work."

For an hour or two after dark Jack and Hugh whittled faithfully and by that time they had prepared a dozen spindles and as many trigger-sticks, and Hugh said that the first thing in the morning they would set a lot of mink traps along both streams.

After the work was done, they sat dreamily before

the fire, Hugh smoking vigorously, and Jack saying and doing nothing, but just giving himself up to the charm of his surroundings.

There is a great delight in a camp among the green timber. The fragrant needles of the evergreens spread thick upon the ground form a soft, dry couch, which would woo sleep to any traveler. A great fire of resinous logs sends up spouts of flame which almost reach the tufted twigs of the great firs that overhang the camp, while clouds of black smoke, and sometimes showers of sparks wind in and out among the branches. The yellow and brown trunks of the trees flicker in the changeful glow of the red light and send queer shadows out behind them into the depths of the timber. Just at the edge of the circle of light are seen the shadowy and uncertain forms of some of the horses which have ceased feeding and have moved closer to the camp to share the cheery sociability of the fire.

Soon after darkness fell in the valley it grew colder, and both Jack and Hugh drew closer to the fire, and before very long both sought the warmth of their blankets.

The morning sun peeping over the snowy tops of the neighboring mountains found Jack and Hugh eating their breakfast and almost ready to start out on their trapping expedition. Soon after they had finished eating, Hugh hung his bottle of beaver medicine about his neck, filled his pockets and those of Jack with trigger-sticks and spindles, and then with half a dozen of the fall-logs under his arm and a bundle of bed-sticks on his back, he started down the stream, followed by Jack, similarly loaded. Hugh pointed out to Jack places along the stream where mink had passed, and before the morning was half gone they had set twelve falls, eight on the main stream and four on the little creek that Jack had followed up the day before.

Hugh set the traps in the way he had explained the night before. He drove the sharpened sticks into the ground near the border of the creek, sometimes up above in the grass, and at others down at the very margin of the water. When his V was about a foot long he left an opening two inches wide in each arm, and then in each arm drove three or four more sticks close together. On the ground and passing through the openings in the arms he placed the bed-stick, setting it well into the soil so that its top was nearly level with the ground. Sometimes he had to dig out a place for the bed-stick and at others he could pound it down to the proper level. Now he placed the fall-log, which passed through both openings in the arms, on top of the bed-stick and then put a spindle and a trigger-stick on the ground by them. Now he tied a stone, if he could find a good one, to the thicker end of the fall-log, or if he could not find a stone, he got three or four slender tree trunks which he rested on the butt of the fall-log at right angles to it.

Meantime he had sent Jack off down the creek to look for frogs, and presently Jack returned with a dozen that he had killed with a stick. Hugh now impaled one of the dead frogs on the pointed end of a spindle, which was notched so that the bait could not be pulled either way. Then with a willow twig he dropped a little of the beaver medicine on the frog, and then telling Jack to raise the fall-log, he placed the butt of the spindle on the bed-log, one end of the trigger-stick on the spindle, and then told Jack to very carefully lower the fall-log until it rested on the trigger-stick. Before this, with his knife he had smoothed away the sides of the fall-log where it passed between the upright sticks in both arms of the V, and had smoothed off the sticks between which the fall-log passed and which were to serve as the guides to the

fall-log, which would meet the bed-stick with an even blow.

"There," said Hugh, as he very carefully removed his hands from the spindle and trigger-stick, "that ought to catch a mink if he'll only come and give a tug at that bait."

"Yes," said Jack, "I think it ought. It seems to me there's a good deal more science and pleasure in setting a trap of that kind than there is in just spreading the jaws of a beaver trap."

"Maybe you're right, son," said Hugh, standing back and looking at his trap. "It does look fairly ship-shape, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Jack, "that looks to me like something that had some science and style about it."

The greater part of the day was devoted to setting these traps, but toward evening Jack and Hugh put on their rubber boots and walked off up to the beaver pond, where four traps were set. After they had finished this, Hugh said, "Son, I believe we might as well go down and look at those mink traps of ours. If anything has been caught we want to take it out and reset. Just as like as not we'll find something."

Jack was eager to learn the result of their morning efforts and wanted to press ahead of Hugh, but did not do so until they had almost reached the first of the dead-falls. Then he ran ahead a few steps, stopping and calling back to Hugh, "That first trap is sprung." When they got up to it they could see a pair of brown hips and a tail sticking out from under the fall-log, and lifting it, a good dark mink was found there, caught just as he should have been.

The next two traps yielded nothing; the fourth another mink; the last two on the main stream were empty, but the four set on the little side creek had each a mink.

They reset all of their traps and returning to camp began to skin the mink, which Hugh explained must not be skinned open, but must be cased.

"Oh, yes, Hugh, I know what you mean," said Jack. "You split them between the hind legs and then turn the skins inside out. You don't split them along the belly."

"That's right," said Hugh, "and then you've got to have stretchers to dry them on. Of course, what we ought to have is boards, but I guess we'll have to do with willow twigs. They don't make quite so nice looking a skin, but they'll serve our purpose, I guess. You may think, son," he went on, "that skinning mink is worse than skinning beaver. These little fellows can smell fearful bad if you're careless about skinning them and cut into these glands that lie near the tail. Be careful not to do that. If you do you won't get rid of the smell in a long time. Watch me skin this first one and then you can go ahead for yourself. You won't lose anything by watching me do it."

The sun had disappeared over the mountains before they had stripped the pelts off their mink, and it was dusk by the time they had eaten supper.

"Now," said Hugh, "we ought to have finished this job up before supper, but I wanted to cook by daylight. Suppose you go over to that bunch of willows there and cut me a dozen straight and pretty stiff willow shoots, then bring them back here."

Jack went over as directed, and in a little while returned with the shoots.

"It was pretty dark, Hugh," he said, "and I had to do it all by feeling. I don't know whether these are what you want." Hugh took the twigs in his hand and looked them over, and after discarding two or three said, "These are all right. Now let's strip the leaves and twigs off them and make them as

smooth as we can. It is not necessary to take off the bark."

When the twigs had been stripped off, Hugh showed Jack how to gradually bend them so that the two ends of the bent twig came together in the shape of a very long and flattened O. He took one of the mink skins —all of which were, of course, wrong side out—and slipped the middle of the doubled twig into the opening in the skin, slowly pushing it down toward the animal's head. The opening of the mouth was too small for the doubled twig to pass through, and the spring of the bent twig kept the sides of the pelt pushed out and stretched. This operation was repeated with each of the skins, and to overcome any shrinking of the pelt, Hugh cut a number of short sticks which he forced between the two ends of each twig which projected from the skin where the hind legs of the mink had been.

The operations had taken but a short time, and when they were over Hugh bundled the skins together and placed them just within the tent. "There," he said, "now, to-morrow morning we'll hang those out where the air will get at them, and before night they will be dry."

They were sitting by the fire, saying but little, when suddenly Hugh, who for some moments had been staring into the darkness in the direction of the horses, leaned over and held his ear near to the ground as if listening.

"What is it, Hugh?" asked Jack.

"Why," said Hugh, "there's some people coming. Put your ear to the ground and listen."

Jack did so, and could hear faintly the tread of something on the ground. "Yes, I hear it," he said. "Are those horses coming?"

"Sure," said Hugh, "I've been watching Pawnee and that black of mine for quite a little while, and I

knew that they heard or smelt something. They've been looking off down the creek for some minutes. I reckon this is a party of travelers, and they'll either come here or camp just below us to-night."

As they sat there, presently the tramp of horses began to be heard and occasionally a call from some man shouting at the animals, and after a little while the people could be heard talking and making remarks about the camp that they saw just ahead of them. A few moments later the horses seemed to come to a standstill, and a man rode up to the circle of the fire and said, "Good-evening."

"Good-evening," said Hugh, "won't you light down and sit?"

"Thank you," said the stranger; "we've got our pack train just here, and we would like to camp by you, if you have no objection."

"Not the least in the world," said Hugh. "The bottom is free to anybody that wants to camp here, and we would like to have you stop. Is there anything we can do for you?"

"It's a little dark to find a good camping place, but the wood and water are handy, and I guess our animals will find the grass. Good-evening"; and he rode away.

After the horse's footsteps had died away, Hugh turned to Jack and said: "Englishmen, I reckon. Likely out here hunting. We'll know more about them in the morning."

"Well," said Jack, "I hope they won't interfere with any of our traps."

"No, I guess not," said Hugh. "The worst they could do would be to blunder into them, and I don't believe they'll do that."

A little later another fire shone out in the little park and lit up another tent not far from theirs. Still later, they received another call from their new neighbors,

who turned out to be an Englishman and his son, a boy about Jack's age, and a packer, a young man from one of the little towns in the mountains west of Denver. The Englishman was a very pleasant-spoken man, greatly interested in the country and all that it contained. His son sat down by Jack, and for a time the two listened to the conversation of their elders, but gradually the English boy's curiosity overcame his shyness and he began to talk to Jack, and ask him questions about the mountains and the hunting. The packer sat by the fire and said little for a time, only occasionally volunteering a remark, but at last he said to Hugh: "Partner, I'd like to have you tell me where we are. I've never been in this part of the country before, and don't claim to know anything about it, but I know east and west and north and south when the sun is shining. Mr. Clifford here hired me to pack for him, not to guide, because I told him that I wasn't a guide in a strange country. He wants to get back to the other side of the mountains, and I told him that I thought maybe if we followed up this creek we'd find a pass over onto the head of one of the streams running the other way. Can you tell me if we'll do that, because unless we do we better get back down onto the flat and hunt some other way across the mountains?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "you can get across this way. This creek is called the Michigan, and if you follow it up you'll come to a pass that will take you onto the head of the Grand River. Of course, now you're on the east side of the main range, that is to say, the water you're on now flows into the Atlantic Ocean; when you get across these mountains you'll be on water flowing into the Pacific Ocean; but all the same you'll be over in Middle Park, and if you want to get back to Denver, that's the way you've got to go."

"Yes," said the Englishman; "I told our friend Jones that I felt sure that if we could get across this

spur of the mountains, our way back would be an easy one, and we would see something of mountain travel, which is what I wish. You see, America is wholly new to my boy and myself, and this part of America, so wild and free and independent, and so full of beautiful forms of animal life, is quite unlike anything that we have ever seen. We find it very interesting."

"Why, yes," said Hugh, "I should think you would. It surely is a pleasant country, and with good weather anyone ought to have a mighty pleasant trip."

The Englishman had many questions to ask Hugh about distances and about the time required for going from one point to another. Meantime, his son was questioning Jack.

"I say," he said, "do you live out here?"

"No," said Jack, "I'm only out here for the summer. My home is in New York."

"Oh," said the English boy, "then perhaps all these things are as strange to you as they are to me."

"No, not quite, I guess," said Jack; "because this is the fifth summer that I've been coming out into this western country and traveling around with Hugh—that's my friend over there. Every summer since I was a little fellow I've been coming out and we've traveled back and forth over a great deal of country."

"Is it possible!" said the English boy. "Why, you are pretty nearly what they call an 'old timer' out here, aren't you? I notice that the people out here are divided into two sorts, 'pilgrims,' who don't know anything about the country, and 'old timers,' who know all about it."

Jack laughed as he said, "That's about right, and I think that maybe I'm an 'old timer.'"

"Where are you going now?" said the English boy. "But first tell me your name, and I'll tell you mine. I am Henry Clifford of Chester, England, and

my father and I are going around the world. We're going to spend this summer in America, and then go to China and India."

"My," said Jack, "that's a nice trip. I would like to make it, but, of course, what I've got to do is to get ready to go to college."

"Yes," said Henry, "I've got to do that, too, but not until I get back to England."

"My name is Jack Danvers," said Jack, "and Hugh and I have come down here from my uncle's ranch to spend the summer trapping here in the mountains. There is quite a lot of fur here, and we've got quite a pack of beaver already. We've got some traps set out here in the creek now, and if we have any luck you'll see us skin some beaver to-morrow morning."

"How awfully interesting," said Henry. "Of course, I've read about trapping beaver, but I never expected to see it done."

"Well, you'll see it to-morrow morning, unless you pull out mighty early."

"I hope we won't," said Henry; "I shall ask my father to lie over here to-morrow if he feels like it. How long are you going to be here?"

"Oh, well," said Jack, "of course, I don't know about that. It'll depend on what luck we have trapping. If we have any luck, we may be up here for several days, if not, we may go on. We were talking about going up to the head of the stream and perhaps hunting there for a day or two. There ought to be sheep up there."

"Sheep," said Henry. "What are those?"

"Why," said Jack, "don't you know the wild mountain sheep?"

"Those fellows that have the big horns? You mean bighorns?" said Henry.

"Yes, sometimes they are called bighorns."

"I know, I know," said the English boy; "I saw

some heads in Denver, but I never supposed that we could get anywhere near where they lived."

"Well," said Jack, "there are plenty of them in these mountains, I guess; in fact, there is lots of game here. Only this morning Hugh ran across a little bunch of cow elk only two or three hundred yards from the camp."

"Is it possible!" said Henry. "We've seen lots of antelope on the prairie, and I shot at them a good many times, but I could not seem to hit them. I don't know why."

"What sort of a gun is yours?" asked Jack.

"It's a Sharp's rifle," was the reply.

"Why," said Jack, "that's a first-class gun. You ought to be able to hit anything with that, if you know the gun. Have you tried it at a target?"

"No," said Henry, "I never shot it off, except at these antelope, and neither my father nor I were able to hit them."

"Well," said Jack, "you can't expect to hit anything unless you have tried your gun and know just how to hold your sights to make your bullet go to a particular spot. That's one of the first things I was taught in rifle shooting, to fire my gun at a mark until I understood just how the sights ought to look to hit the mark at different distances. If we were going to travel together for a while, I could teach you how to shoot, I expect, just as Hugh taught me a good many years ago."

"My word," said Henry. "I wish we were going to travel together. I'm going to see what my father means to do to-morrow."

While the boys were talking, Mr. Clifford had been questioning Hugh, as his son had been questioning Jack, and had expressed to Hugh so much interest in what he and Jack were doing that Hugh had suggested that they lie over a day and rest their horses.

After the strangers had left the camp and gone back to their own, Hugh told Jack what he had suggested to the Englishman. "You see, son," he said, "these people are regular pilgrims, and they don't know anything about the country, and they want to know a heap. That young fellow they have with them is a nice young chap, but he doesn't know any more than they know. The man is mighty pleasant spoken for an Englishman, and just as common as you and me. He don't put on any lugs at all. If they choose to lie over to-morrow and watch you and me doing our chores round camp, it won't do us any harm, and it may give them some pleasure and teach them something. If after a day or two they aren't just the kind of people we want to have 'round, we're always free to pack up and strike out. They can't follow us."

"How do you mean can't follow us, Hugh?" said Jack.

"Why, what I mean is," said Hugh, "if they want to stick with us, and we don't want them, it wouldn't take us half a day to lose them in this timber, and we could go off where we wanted to."

"Well," said Jack, "I like that boy Henry very much. He seemed to want to know all about things, and didn't seem to be ashamed to say that he didn't know anything. He's very much interested in trapping, and wants to see us at work, and I told him if they didn't pull out too early to-morrow they would probably see us skin beaver."

"Well," said Hugh, "I don't know what they're going to do, but whatever they do, it won't make much difference to us. Now, we've done a whole lot of visiting to-night, and you and I had better go to bed."

XVIII

THE ENGLISH PILGRIMS

Jack felt a little reluctant to crawl out of his warm blankets next morning when he heard the snapping and crackling of the fire, but habit was too strong for sleepiness, and he got up and hurried into his shoes and clothing as rapidly as he could, and then went out to the fire. It was still dark, and even the first signs of dawn had not begun to appear in the east.

"Now, son," said Hugh, "go out just as quick as you can, and get a pack horse and bring him in and put the saddle on him. We may as well walk this morning, but if we get a couple of beaver we ought to have a horse. By the time you get a saddle on him, grub will be ready, and mighty soon after that it will be light."

Hugh was quite right, and by the time they had finished eating it was light enough to see, and a few moments later they were on their way to visit the traps. The English party had camped quite close to where the first trap was set, and it had not been disturbed. Hugh declared that the white tent, set back on the bank not far from the stream, had frightened the beaver away. The next trap, a little lower down, contained a beaver, and so with the other two across the pond. The beaver were loaded on the pack horse, and then a round was made of the dead-falls, from which five mink were taken.

"Quite a bunch of fur for the traps we set," said Hugh, as they returned to camp.

As they passed the camp of the Englishmen, the packer was seen building a fire, having apparently just

gotten up, but the Englishman and his son had not yet arisen, and Jack called out to the packer, asking him to tell Henry Clifford to come over to their camp after he had finished breakfast, and a muffled call from the inside of the tent showed that the boy had heard the message.

A moment later he was seen peering out of the tent door, and staring with greatest intentness at the pack horse and its load of fur-bearing animals.

Hugh and Jack returned to their camp, but when they reached it, Hugh said to Jack, "Now, son, if we're going to stay here three or four days, we don't want to litter up this camp with a lot of carcasses. Let's go off back into the timber a little way, and do our skinning there instead of doing it in the camp."

"I think so, too, Hugh," answered Jack. "It'll be a great deal more comfortable for us, and it's really no more trouble to go up there a short distance than to dump the load out here."

"All right," said Hugh, "we'll go up there, and we can choose a place from which we can see camp, and then if that young Englishman comes over, you can call him up to where we are. if he wants to see what we're doing."

Accordingly, they got their skinning knives and whetstones, and, going up the side of the valley, sat down on the hillside just within the pine timber. Both the camps were in sight from there.

They were both hard at work, each one on his first beaver, when Jack happened to look down toward the camp and saw the English boy and his father standing in front of the tent and gazing around as if looking for the owners of the camp.

"There are our friends down in camp, Hugh," said Jack.

"Well," said Hugh, "call them up here if you want to, or, at all events, let them see where we are, and then they can come if they feel like it."

Jack stepped out on the open hillside and whooped, and, when the strangers looked at him, waved his hat, and father and son started towards them, while Jack went back to resume his work.

Presently the two Englishmen came up to where they were, panting a little from the exertion of the climb. The son had his eyes fast on the beaver and the skinning, but his father, as soon as he reached the place, turned about and looked up and down the valley and across at the opposite mountains.

"An extraordinarily beautiful spot you've chosen for your work," he said to Hugh, and Hugh nodded without speaking. And, indeed, it was a lovely place. Opposite, the mountainside rose steeply, clothed with dark green timber to its crest. Away to the northeast lay the valley of the stream, with little parks and openings through which flowed the shining waters, amid groves of pale aspens, which, as the valley met the hillside, changed to dark pines. Up the valley the view was cut off by the hills, but where the company was gathered there was bright sunshine, and a lovely view.

"Are those beavers?" said Mr. Clifford, pointing to the animals that lay on the ground. "My son told me that you were trapping, and we came over to see what your success had been."

"Yes," said Hugh, "those are beaver, and this is a part of the work of getting them."

"How very interesting," said Mr. Clifford. "But, is not the work very hard?"

"Well," said Hugh, "that depends a little on how you look at it. Work that a man is used to does not seem hard to him, while a new job may seem very hard."

"True, true," said Mr. Clifford. "But I think the work of skinning these animals, to say nothing of trapping them and bringing them to this place, would seem to me very difficult."

"That is what Jack thought for the first two or

three days that we were at work, but he's got so used to it now that he can skin a beaver pretty nearly as fast as I, and I don't think he minds the work nearly as much as he did."

Henry Clifford had seated himself on the ground close to Jack, and was watching the operation of skinning with the utmost interest.

"You seem to do that wonderfully well," he said, "and very fast. I wonder if I could learn how to do it?"

"Of course you could," said Jack, "if you feel like it; but it's greasy work, as you can see for yourself."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind that," said Henry. "I should like to try and see if I could do it."

"Well," said Jack, "you have to be pretty careful not to cut the skin. If you make a hole in it, that takes away from its value, and every particle of the skin has got to be cut loose from the fat. You can not strip it off, as you can the hide of a deer."

"Would you mind if I tried to help you?" said Henry.

"Not a bit," said Jack, "I'd rather like to have you. If you like, I'll give you this knife that I'm using, and I'll take my jack-knife, and we can work together on this beaver. Perhaps if we do that we'll be able to beat Hugh, and get the hide off before he finishes his."

Jack whetted his knife on the whetstone and gave it to Henry, showing him how to take hold of the knife, and how to cut through the fat. "You had better roll up your sleeves," he said, "before you begin, for this grease gets all over everything."

Henry did so, and Jack took his jack-knife out of his pocket, and they both set to work.

Of course Jack had to watch Henry, to see that he did not cut the hide and that he did not leave too much fat on it, and that made him work more slowly than he otherwise would have done, but Henry took hold

very well, and seemed to remember everything that Jack told him, and before long it was only necessary for Jack to give an occasional glance at the other's work.

Hugh had only just pulled the hide free from his beaver when the two boys threw aside the carcass at which they had been working.

"Ah, Hugh," said Jack, "since I've got an assistant here I can work nearly as fast as you."

Hugh looked around and saw that both boys had been skinning, and seemed surprised and pleased, as did also Mr. Clifford, who said, "Why, Henry, I had no idea you knew anything about skinning an animal. Where did you learn?"

"I've learned all I know since we've been sitting here, father. Jack explained to me how it was done, and he and I have been working together ever since we got here."

Mr. Clifford, who had been talking continuously with Hugh in a low tone of voice, seemed greatly interested in him, and finally asked him if he was willing that he and his party should stay with him and Jack so long as they were here in the valley.

Hugh had replied that they would be glad to have them do so, but had said also that it was uncertain how long they would be here. They had proposed to go only up as far as the pass at the head of the stream, and then to return and to go south, into Middle Park, by way of Arapaho Pass.

The English people seemed very pleasant, and very much interested in all that they saw, and were evidently anxious to learn from Hugh and Jack all that they could about the country and the ways of life in it.

It was not yet the middle of the day when they had finished their skinning, and dragging the beaver carcasses off to one side, left them on a little bench of flat meadow, above which a spring trickled out of the hillside. Good-sized pine trees grew on the knolls on

either side of this little meadow. As all hands started down for Hugh's camp, Hugh said to Jack, "We'll keep a lookout on those carcasses, and maybe before we go back we'll get a bear there."

"Why, Hugh," said Jack, "have you seen any sign?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "the day we got here I saw a little sign up the creek, and you know you started a bear yourself that same day."

"That's so," said Jack. "I don't expect, though, that bears will come down in the daytime to feed right in sight of the tents."

"No," said Hugh, "they won't. We've got to build a dead-fall here, and very likely we won't catch anything until we've moved."

Mr. Clifford and his son, who had heard this conversation, were more or less mystified by it, and Mr. Clifford asked Hugh, "Are there really bears about here, Mr. Johnson?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "there are plenty of bears, but, of course, you might travel a long time in these mountains without ever seeing one. There is no animal in all the hills that is as shy as the bear, and it's always likely to see and hear and smell you before you see it."

"And what is a dead-fall?" said Mr. Clifford.

"Why," said Hugh, "if you and your boy will come with us now you'll be able to see some, and can understand what it is better by looking at it than by having me explain it."

They stopped at the tent, and while Hugh prepared to cook the noon meal, Jack brought some water and chopped some wood and built the fire. Their friends sat down on the ground near at hand, and talked about their trapping.

"How very fortunate we are to have met you," said Mr. Clifford. "All this life and all the creatures of the mountains seem to be known to you. Then, too, your eyes are trained; you see a thousand things that

we do not see, and never would see unless they were pointed out to us. I have read in books so many stories about the wonderful skill of the western mountain man in reading the signs of the prairie. I feel that we are very fortunate to have met people who can do that."

So Mr. Clifford and Hugh talked over many things, and Jack was somewhat astonished to hear Hugh speak freely about matters connected with Hugh's early life of which he himself had known only within two or three years.

"I should like to see a trap built to catch a bear," said Henry.

"Well," said Jack, "I never saw a big dead-fall built, but it must be a lot of work to make one. You see, a bear is a powerfully strong animal, and a very heavy weight would be needed to crush it. I have seen quite a number of grizzly bears, and it seems to me that they're the most powerful animal that there is. I believe that a grizzly bear, nine times out of ten, would be able to kill a buffalo, and a buffalo is about the biggest and strongest thing that we have in this country."

After the four had eaten, Hugh and Jack quickly washed up the dishes, and then Hugh said to Jack, "Son, let us go and look at those mink traps of ours. You and Henry can go ahead, if you like, and Mr. Clifford and I will follow. If you find anything in the traps, reset them, and if the bait is gone, get some more and I will bring the medicine along."

Hugh got his bottle of beaver medicine and hung it around his neck, and then the two older men followed the boys, who had started off. When they passed the Cliffords' camp, their packer was seen sitting under the shade of a bush, and when the boys came in sight he walked over to meet them, and said, "Well, I'm glad to see you again. I tell you it's been a mighty lonely morning, with nothing to do and nobody to see."

"Come on with us," said Jack. "We're going to look at some traps we've set along the creek."

"I'd be right glad to," said the young man, and the three walked briskly along. At the first dead-fall the bait was undisturbed, but in the second a mink was found. Jack stopped and explained the principle of the dead-fall to Henry, illustrating it by what was now before their eyes.

While they were talking, Hugh and Mr. Clifford came up and the lesson had to be gone over again, this time by Hugh, for the benefit of the older man. Hugh took the mink, and, slitting it across from one heel to the other under the tail, skinned away a little bit from the hams, and cutting out the two glands about which he had warned Jack when they first began to skin minks, he cut one of them open and smeared it over the bait. The odor of the cut gland was very offensive, but Hugh declared that it was the best kind of medicine for mink.

A round of the traps gave them two more mink, and Hugh declared that mink must be pretty plenty, since, during the morning, three had gone into the traps. By midafternoon they had made their rounds, and on their way back to camp stopped at the Cliffords' tent, and here Mr. Clifford and Henry asked them in, showed them a number of things that they had brought with them from England, among them a huge knife nearly a foot long, which to Jack seemed to have a hundred blades and implements. Mr. Clifford gave Hugh a package of tobacco, and Henry presented Jack with a volume which contained six books of Homer's Iliad. Then the two Americans went on to their tent, having promised to come back and eat supper with the Cliffords.

"That was a wonderful knife Mr. Clifford had, wasn't it, Hugh?" said Jack, as they approached their tent.

"Yes," said Hugh, "it was sure a wonderful thing. It seemed to me fit to be stuck up in a museum. I wouldn't pack around a piece of hardware as big as that if one would give it to me. There are, maybe, three or four useful tools in it, and the rest of it is just so much wood and iron.

"That's just what I was thinking, Hugh, that more than half of the things there were no good, and that you'd pretty nearly have to have an extra horse to carry it around with you."

"Yes," said Hugh, "that's just one of those things that storekeepers get up to sell to pilgrims. The storekeepers don't know what is needed out in this country, and the pilgrims don't, either, but the storekeepers pretend they know, and the pilgrims believe them. That's mighty pleasant tobacco that Mr. Clifford gave me," he continued. "I tried some of it this morning. I don't know as I like it as well as my plug, but it was mighty kind of him to give it to me, for I reckon it costs a good lot of money."

"Yes," said Jack, "that was nice, and it was nice in Henry to give me this book. I am a fool not to have brought two or three good books out with me into this country. A man has lots of time when he might read, and instead of that I always lie down and go to sleep. I'm going to try and read a lot of this book before our trip is over."

That afternoon Jack read for an hour in his book, and then proposed to Hugh, who was working over one of the newly stretched beaver skins, that they should take their rifles and walk up the creek for an hour. "I don't mean to hunt," said Jack, "but just to see how the trail is."

"That's good," said Hugh, "I'd like to go, and we can just as well walk as ride."

They set out, following the dim trail, which soon went into the green timber. After they had gone a

mile or more up the valley, they came upon abundant sign of deer and elk, and a little later, as they paused, just before stepping out into a park, Hugh touched Jack on the shoulder and pointed to the mountain side far above him, where, after looking for a moment, Jack saw half a dozen elk walking across a little opening in the timber.

"I reckon," said Hugh, "there's lots of elk right here close. Of course, those that are down low are all cows and calves, but I reckon that if we get up high we will find the bulls. I expect likely these Britishers would like mighty well to kill an elk, and I expect, also, that we can take them right up to one."

"My," said Jack, "I would like to do that. I would like to watch that boy when he got close to game and see what he does. But, Hugh," he went on, "he tells me that he never shot his gun at anything. He hasn't any idea where it shoots, nor how."

"Well," said Hugh, "why don't you take him out and give him a lesson in shooting?"

"Well," said Jack, "so I might, but, of course, I can't do it around the camp. It would scare the beaver, and we'd scare the bear, and we might scare the elk."

"Well," said Hugh, "take him down the creek three or four miles to some little park there, far enough off so that the guns won't sound like much, and give him a lesson. You know very well he'll never be able to hit anything until he has learned how his gun shoots."

"I believe I'll try that to-morrow, Hugh," said Jack.

It was soon time for them to turn back, and immediately after reaching camp they went over to the Cliffords and supped with them.

During the evening Jack proposed to Henry that on the following day, after the work was over, they should go down the stream a short distance and try their guns, and Mr. Clifford, when he heard what they were talking of, asked to be of the party, also. After

some discussion, it was agreed that all hands should start as soon as possible next morning, and that the rifles of both the Cliffords should be tried, so that later, if possible, they might be able to kill some game, but the events of the next day somewhat modified this program.

Jack and Hugh had reached their first beaver trap in the gray of the next morning, and after they had made the rounds they found themselves with two beaver and seven mink. The loaded pack horse was taken up to the place where they had skinned the day before, and the loads thrown down; but before Hugh began work he stepped over to where he could look down on the little meadow where the beaver carcasses had been thrown yesterday.

After he had looked, he returned to where Jack had already split his beaver, and said, "Well, son, the bears have been down at our meat below, and I reckon that instead of going down the creek to teach the boy how to shoot, two or three of us will have to stay here and build that trap."

"It will be quite a job, won't it, Hugh?" said Jack. "A lot of trees will have to be cut and hauled and put up. We're in better shape now to do it than we would have been before these strangers came, but still, it's going to be quite a lot of work, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "of course it will be some work, but maybe not so very much. If this young man Jones is any kind of an axman, he and I can cut the trees and build the pen in half a day. We ought to begin that right away, and if possible get the pen built to-night. Then, if we put these carcasses in it without setting it to-night, we'll have a mighty good show of catching something to-morrow night."

"Well, Hugh, I don't see why we couldn't do it," said Jack. "We certainly need another bear hide or two."

"Yes," said Hugh, "so we do. Of course, though,

if these strangers help us to build the pen, why, the fur has got to be divided up with them."

"That's so," said Jack, "but just think what fun it will be for them to help build the trap and to get the bear, if we do get one. They'll think that they're right in it, won't they; that they're real old trappers?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "I reckon they will. They seem to be mightily taken with all this life out here, and we'd both be glad to show them anything that we can."

"Of course we would," said Jack. "I think they're having a bully time, and it seems to me that Mr. Clifford is having about as good a time as his son."

"Yes," said Hugh, "I think they both like it. I reckon before long they'll both of them be up here, and then we can talk over the bear trap matter."

As Hugh had predicted, it was not long before Mr. Clifford and Henry were seen walking over, first to Hugh's camp, and then, when they found that deserted, up to the hill where Hugh and Jack were skinning.

After a little talk, the subject of the bear trap was broached, and both the Englishmen were delighted with the idea of putting it up.

"But how long will it take to build it?" said Mr. Clifford.

"Oh," said Hugh, "I reckon we can get it in shape before night; that is to say, if we all work at it, and, in fact, I wouldn't be surprised if we could finish it two or three hours before sundown. Do you know what sort of an axman Jones is?"

"No," said Mr. Clifford, "I do not; but I can handle an ax myself. I have chopped down a good many trees back in the old country."

"Why," said Hugh, "that's better yet. But I don't know if we've got axes enough for three people to handle; we've only one in our camp."

"I think we have two," said Mr. Clifford.

"Well," said Hugh, "if you have two, why don't you and Henry go down and get your man and the three axes and come up here, and then just as soon as we've finished our work we can go and cut some timber. There's lots of it here, and it's right handy to snake down. Then, while we are chopping, the boys can get the horses, and they can snake the logs out to where we'll need them."

"Good enough," said Jack. "I'll bet we'll get those logs down faster than they can cut and trim them."

Mr. Clifford and his son started on their errand, and not long after their return with Jones and the three axes the work of skinning the fur was over, and the beaver carcasses were ready to be used for bait.

Hugh now led the way up on the hillside to where there were a number of tall, slender pines, and he and Mr. Clifford and Jones each attacked one. The trees were eight or ten inches through, and were soon brought to the ground. Then they were cut in twenty-foot lengths, and the branches trimmed from them. Meantime, Jack and Henry had gone down to the camp, saddled four of the riding horses, which were brought back to where they were chopping, and Jack, putting a lariat around one end of a log, and taking a turn of the other about his saddle horn, started off to draw the stick out to the place where the trap was to be built. Hugh showed Henry how to do the same thing, and thus the logs were gradually brought out of the timber and to the meadow. Once in a while the end of a stick would catch on a root, and it would be necessary to dismount and lift it over, but after a while a trail was worn, in which the logs slipped smoothly. Before long Hugh declared that enough sticks had been cut, and then, going to the tops of the trees which had been cut down, he cut a number of stakes about eight feet long, which he sharpened at one end, Mr. Clifford and Jones helping him in this

work. Then the boys snaked bundles of these stakes down to the building ground, and waited to see Hugh make his trap. He built his pen in the shape of a narrow V, driving these sharpened sticks into the meadow and piling the logs against them so as to make a wall of logs. Shorter logs and brush were then piled on top of the V nearly to its opening. A bed-stick was laid across the opening, just as had been done with the mink dead-fall, and the fall-log was arranged to run between four tall stakes, two on either side. All this was not done without much use of the ax, much lifting of logs, and much expense of strength and perspiration; but at last, when it was done, Hugh seemed satisfied, and said, "There, I guess that will do. Now," he said, "we will lift up this fall-log and prop it so that the bears cannot pull it down. They may not feel like going in the first night, but if there should be any young, foolish ones in the family they'll go in, and when the old ones see that they are not hurt, they'll come in, too. Then the next night we'll see what will happen."

The trigger and spindle for the trap were not yet prepared, but Hugh had cut two sticks from which they were to be made, and declared that he would do that work in camp. The carcasses of the beaver were now thrown into the traps so that they lay about four feet inside of the bed-stick, and were fastened there by a stout stick driven through them into the ground.

"There," said Hugh, "I guess now we can quit. That job is all right, and if we get some beaver to-morrow, we're likely to have bear the next morning."

They all felt better when they had returned to camp and washed off the grime of their work and were sitting around the fire. It was not yet supper time, and yet there was not time for the boys to go off on the target-shooting trip which Jack had planned. He spoke of this to Henry, and explained to him over again how hopeless it was for him to do any hunting

unless he had learned just how his gun shot, and just how the trigger pulled off.

Mr. Clifford, who was listening, seemed interested, and said, "I can understand, Jack, something of what you say. I have never shot a rifle until I came to America, but it is easy to understand why the muscles of the shoulders and arms and of the fingers must all work together perfectly to send a bit of lead over a great distance to a particular spot. We are learning a great deal in these last two or three days, are we not, Henry?"

"Yes, indeed, we are, father," his son replied.

"I think, if you will let me, Jack, I will go with you to-morrow and try my gun when Henry tries his."

"Why, of course, Mr. Clifford," said Jack. "I'd be mighty glad if you would. I was talking about that with Hugh only this morning, and telling him I didn't see how it would be possible for you to have any luck hunting until you had learned these things. You see, I am now telling you only just what Hugh told me years ago, when I first came out here. These are not discoveries that I have made, but things that I've been taught, and that I suppose everybody must be taught, or must learn for himself."

"Well," said Hugh, "I've always said that you took hold of this rifle shooting, almost from the start, son, better than anybody that I ever saw begin. Just as soon as you had learned something about shooting, you were always steady and a good shot."

"Well," said Mr. Clifford, "why should we not all go off to-morrow to this place where Jack is going to try Henry's gun, and then both of us can take a lesson? Why will you not come, Mr. Johnson, and teach me while Jack teaches my boy?"

"Why, surely, I'd like to," said Hugh. "No reason why I should stay in camp to-morrow afternoon."

Hugh asked Mr. Clifford and his son and Jones to

eat supper with them that night, and they did so, and after the visitors had returned to their camp, Hugh said to Jack, "Son, we are poor for meat again; you or I will have to go up in the hills and kill something, or else we'll have to eat beaver."

"Well," said Jack, "let's wait and see what happens to-morrow. Perhaps we might run on something when we go down the creek."

"We might," said Hugh, "but I don't think we'll go down far enough to see any antelope, and we're not likely to run on any game down here in the valley."

"Well," said Jack sleepily, "we've got to have something to eat, of course," and they went to bed.

Jack was pretty anxious to go up to the bear trap the first thing next morning and see what had been there, but, as usual, they went down over the trapping ground, and this morning their luck was bad. Only one beaver was found, and in the dead-falls there were but three mink. "Time for us to move, I guess, son," said Hugh.

"Looks that way, doesn't it?" said Jack. "Well, never mind; we've done pretty well here, and there are lots more creeks here in the mountains."

"Well, yes," said Hugh; "we can load up both horses with beaver, if we want to, but I don't believe you do."

"No," replied Jack, "I don't believe I do."

When they had reached the skinning ground, Jack looked down on the bear trap and could see that something had been there; in fact, it looked as if a regular trail led through the grass up to the entrance to the pen.

"I declare, Hugh," he said, "it looks to me as if there had been a whole drove of bears down there by the opening of that pen. There seems to be more sign than we saw yesterday, a good deal."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Hugh, "if quite a lot of bears had come down there. Animals learn

soon about good feeding places; I don't know how, but they do."

"Well, now, if you will skin these three mink, I'll take this beaver, and we'll see which gets through first."

They had almost finished skinning, when their friends came up.

"I'll tell you, Henry," said Jack, "you've got to get up earlier in the morning if you're going to be a sure enough mountain man. I like mighty well to stay abed in the morning, but this trip Hugh has me up long before light every day, and I'm getting so I don't mind it a bit."

"Well," said Hugh, "if you are trapping, you want to get to your traps just as early in the day as you can see. Many a man has saved a beaver by doing that. You see, a beaver often gets caught when it's going home just before daylight, and it takes him some little time to thresh around and twist his feet off."

"Why, of course, rising in the morning is all a habit," said Mr. Clifford. "It's just as easy to get up at one hour as it is at another. In India, where, on account of the heat, we slept through the middle of the day, we used to get up before light, always."

"Well, Henry," said Hugh, "Jack tells me that there are lots of bear sign down at the pen, and I reckon we better do down and see what happened there." They went down there, and even Hugh was surprised at the amount of sign they found. Not the smallest vestige of the beaver remained, and all about the stick which had been thrust through them the ground was dug up and rooted over, as if the bears had suspected that something was buried there.

"Well, son," said Hugh, "I don't know but we've got more of a contract here than we reckoned on. We'll have to get a fresh bait for to-morrow night, sure. For as many bears as there are here, we ought to be able to catch two or three of them. You run down to the camp and bring up those sticks for the trigger and

spindle, that I took down last night, and we'll fix them and set the trap now."

Jack brought the sticks, and some little time was devoted to arranging the trap. The beaver carcass was put on the end of the spindle and firmly tied there; a stake was driven into the ground just behind the bait, to hold in place the point of the spindle. A branch an inch long, standing out from the side of this stake at right angles to it, was smoothed so that the spindle, if pulled on, might easily slip out from under it. Then the other end of the spindle was rested on the bed-stick projecting out six or eight inches toward the mouth of the pen.

"Now," said Hugh, "this fall-log is heavy, and we've got to handle it pretty carefully. We don't want any of us to get caught in our own bear trap." He drove a stout stake into the ground just outside of the front one of the two stakes that were to guide the fall-log, and then, getting a long pole for a lever, the fall-log was lifted, the stake which had supported it was knocked away, and then the fall-log lowered until it was about four feet above the bait-stick. Then leaving Jones to hold the fall-log in position with the lever, Hugh went inside, and, resting one end of the trigger-stick on the portion of the spindle which projected beyond the bed-stick toward the mouth of the pen, he told Jones to lower the fall-log very slowly. Jones obeyed instructions, and after raising and lowering it several times, the fall-log and the spindle were held apart by the trigger-stick, and so delicately balanced that it looked to the boys almost as if a breath would disarrange them and bring the heavy fall-log down.

"There," said Hugh. "Now let's get out of this as quick as we can. I'm hungry and want something to eat." And indeed it was time that they should eat, for in their earnestness to set the trap the noon hour had long passed.

XIX

THE FIRST BIGHORN

After they had eaten, it was still the middle of the afternoon, and Jack said to Hugh, "Hugh, why shouldn't we all set off and go down the creek and help the Cliffords try their guns this afternoon? There is plenty of time to do that before dark, and then if we have any chance to hunt right soon those people will know something about where they are shooting."

"No reason at all why we shouldn't do it. If you'll fetch in the saddle horses, we'll start over and get the Cliffords now."

It took but a few moments to get the horses and saddle them. When the suggestion was made to Mr. Clifford and Henry, they, too, saddled up, and a few moments later the four were trotting down the trail.

In an open park, a couple of miles below the camp, Jack slashed the bark from a tree trunk, making a target, and then, stepping off a hundred yards, he said to Henry, "Now let me have your gun and I will fire three or four sighting shots, so that I can find out just how to hold it, and then you can shoot, and very few shots will tell you how you ought to hold your gun to hit the mark, or, at least, to come very close to it."

The shots fired by Jack showed him that, as is usually the case, Henry's gun was sighted to shoot high, but by drawing the fore sight down very fine, he put the last two shots within an inch and a half of each other at the center of the target. Then he explained to Henry what it was necessary for him to do; that he should draw the sight down, so fine that only the tip of the foresight could be seen in the notch of the

rear sight; that he should not try to hold his rifle steadily for a time on the target, but should aim at the center and should pull the trigger just as the sight was about to pass over the center of the target. After three or four shots, and comments and criticisms by Hugh and Jack, Henry was able to bunch his bullets very close around the center of the mark he was shooting at, and quickly came to understand the process of handling the gun so that his bullets would go close to where he wished them to.

After Henry had finished, Hugh took Mr. Clifford in hand, and he, having had the benefit of seeing what his son had done, learned still more easily what was required of him, and in a very few shots seemed to have mastered the art of short-range rifle shooting, which is so often very difficult of acquirement.

The sun was yet an hour high when they finished their work and, mounting, rode back to the camp. The two boys galloped ahead, while the older men followed, also riding fast. They had almost reached the Clifford camp when Jack heard a dull sound, followed by a faint cry, a sort of squall which he did not recognize. Instantly he pulled up his horse and sat there listening, and in a moment Hugh and Mr. Clifford had overtaken the boys and stopped. Jack called back, "Did you hear that, Hugh? What was it?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "I heard something, and I suspect our dead-fall is sprung, and sprung by some animal, too."

"That's what it sounded like to me. That heavy noise was something falling. Let's ride up there and see what it is."

They pushed on by the camps, and presently came in sight of the dead-fall and could see that the fall-log had dropped. A moment later Jack saw a little bear on the hillside, which sat up and looked for a moment, and then ran away into the timber. When they had

come close to the dead-fall they saw the fall-log lay across the body of a bear, and, dismounting at a little distance, they approached it. The bear was a large female, and the dead-fall had fallen across its shoulders and apparently broken the neck.

"I don't understand this, Hugh," said Jack. "The log ought to have struck her farther back. She could not reach the bait from this position. Could she have touched the bait and then jumped back while the log was falling?"

"No, son," said Hugh. "This bear did not spring the trap." As he spoke, he stepped over the fall-log and entered the pen, and after looking about a moment he turned and said, "She had a cub with her. and the cub pushed in ahead and got hold of the bait and sprung the trap just in time to catch the old one." Then he pointed out to the others the tracks made by the little bear, and showed how it had grasped the bait, pulled it to one side, and then, frightened by the noise of the falling log, had bolted out of the pen.

"I only see tracks of one cub," said Hugh, "but very likely there may have been two. Did you see more than the one as we came up, son?" he asked Jack.

"No," answered Jack, "I saw only one."

"Well," said Hugh, "let us get this bear out and skin it if we can before dark, and set the trap again. We're likely to catch another bear to-night."

All hands took hold of the fall-log, lifted it off the bear, and then propped it up and hauled the bear out in front of the pen.

"Now," said Hugh, "it's going to be a job to skin this bear, and unless we all take hold of it we can't get it done to-night. If we leave it here, and the bears come down to the trap again, they will eat it up, and we'll lose the hide, and very likely they won't go into the trap. What do you say, Mr. Clifford?" turning to the Englishman. "Are you willing to lend a hand to skin this bear?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Clifford, after a moment's hesitation. "I shall be glad to. We came out into this country to gain new experience, and we may as well take part in all the work that presents itself."

"All right," said Hugh, "let's go at it right now. And Jack, son," he went on, "you go down to our camp and get the beaver knives and whetstones, and then go down to Mr. Clifford's camp and get Jones to come here and help."

Jack turned his horse and rode off without a word. Hugh called out to him, "Bring the ax with you when you come back." Jack signed that he understood, and went on.

When he returned with Jones, the bear had been slit and the three companions were hard at work at it, the Englishmen working very slowly and clumsily, and Hugh very quickly. When Jack and Jones took hold, the work proceeded much more rapidly, and just about sunset the last cuts were made, and the hide freed from the carcass. Then Hugh had everyone take hold and pull the body of the bear back into the very end of the pen beyond the bait, and then all hands went to work and reset the trap. The bear hide was rolled up and thrown across Jack's saddle, and he led the snorting Pawnee down to the camp, while Henry and Jones walked on either side, holding the hide in place.

"You men had better stop and eat with me," said Hugh. "Our grub is getting pretty low; we haven't anything but bread and bacon and coffee, but to-morrow, if nothing happens, we shall have some fresh meat."

The conversation that evening was much about bears, Mr. Clifford and his son asking a multitude of questions, to which Hugh replied as best he could. Mr. Clifford seemed to have an absorbing thirst for knowledge, and never grew weary of asking Hugh questions about the country and its life and the ways of its inhabitants.

Before the English party went to their camp, Hugh said, "Now, I think, to-morrow, as soon as we get done with whatever work we may find, we'd better move on up the creek and see if we can get into the high mountains where there's game. We're plumb out of meat, and then, I reckon, you all would like a day or two of hunting. We can kill some meat and dry some of it, and then I expect Mr. Clifford and his folks will go on down Grand River, and we'll come back and go down toward Middle Park by way of the Rabbit Ears."

Everybody seemed to think that to go hunting would be very pleasant, but Mr. Clifford made no reply to the suggestion that they would go down Grand River.

The round of the traps next morning yielded only one beaver and a couple of mink.

"Well, son," said Hugh, "I reckon there's not much more for us here in the way of fur, and we'll get this beaver skinned early and move on up the creek, unless we have a bear, and about that we'll know in a few moments now."

They rode over to the skinning place, and from that looked down on the bear trap. It was sprung, but when they went down, there was nothing in it. The beaver which had served as bait, however, was gone, and a considerable part of the old bear was eaten. There were fresh tracks and other sign all about, showing that several bears had been in the pen during the night.

"It's those durned cubs," said Hugh. "They come in here and pull at the bait and spring the trap and then get scared and run away, and later the bigger bears come down and eat the bait. I don't know that we'll do anything more with this trap, and, any way, it won't pay to set it just as we're going away. If we were going to be near enough so that we could come down here every day and look at it, it would be dif-

ferent; but it's quite a long ride up to the pass, and if we're going to hunt, we won't feel much like riding down here."

Before they had finished skinning the beaver, the Cliffords had come up the hill, and after the work was over Hugh and Jack took them down to the bear trap and explained the situation. Then Hugh proposed that they should all pack up and start up the stream for the pass, and before noon the pack train, now more than doubled in numbers, was climbing toward the summit.

It was a delightful ride through the green timber, with frequent glimpses of the brawling stream, which grew constantly smaller, steeper, and more noisy. Hugh led the way, followed by a couple of horses, and the strangers rode among the pack animals, each with one or more of the horses in front of him. Jack brought up the rear, having been told to do so by Hugh, and kept watch of the trail and of the animals ahead of him. Hugh had thought that they might reach the pass before night, but in this he was mistaken. The sun had already disappeared behind the overshadowing mountains when they reached a little level opening in the timber, and here Hugh turned aside and declared that they would camp. Just as he was about to swing himself out of the saddle, a white-tailed deer walked out from a bunch of willows along the stream and stood looking curiously at the strange visitors, and Hugh, slipping a cartridge into his gun, shot at it, and it fell. It proved to be a yearling doe, and was in good order. Before Hugh had returned with the meat and the hide, camp had been made, the tents were up, and the fires going and the horses short picketed on the grass. There were many hands, and the work went quickly.

The night was cold, and all hands were early astir and clustered about the fire. There was frost on the grass, on the willows, and on the horses' manes. The

ropes were frozen, and there was a skim of ice over the quiet water of the pool in front of the camp. As the sun rose, however, everything warmed up; the frost melted, the high grass and willow bushes began to drip with moisture, and the ropes to dry; and, after the sun had been shining for an hour or two, the horses were packed and the train started out again.

It was interesting to Jack and to the English boy to notice in the shaded spots how the beautiful summer flowers, that they had so much admired the day before, were wilted and cut down by the frost, but in the open spaces where the sun shone on them the flowers seemed to speedily recover and once more held up their heads. As the train proceeded, the valley became more narrow and rough, and the impetuous force of the stream, which was now only a brook, increased. Sometimes it fell down in a sheer cascade for ten or fifteen feet, and at such points the trail left the stream and wound about in the timber, zigzagging up the hill until the ascent was overcome, when it returned near to the water's edge. Some of the slopes were steep and some seemed dangerous, places where a misstep by the horse might throw the rider down forty or fifty feet into the stream below. One or two of the horses, whose packs, though light, were bulky and stood up high above the saddle, looked, as they climbed the steep places, as if they must be overbalanced by their load and fall backward.

To Mr. Clifford and his son this method of traveling was absolutely novel and at first really alarming. Neither said anything, however, but watched Hugh and Jack. They saw that these two rode along unconcernedly, and from this inferred that the danger was more apparent than real.

At last the valley through which they were traveling became a mere gorge, and at length, after climbing a few hundred feet up a very steep slope, they found themselves at the edge of the large timber. The view

here was something to make even Jack catch his breath, accustomed as he was to mountain scenery. Before them lay a gently rising alpine meadow, intersected by ravines, in which a few stunted spruces flourished, and then above this was a wide amphitheater surrounded on all sides by rugged and towering rock summits. The floor of the amphitheater sloped smoothly down to a brook which flowed through its midst, and this brook came from a lake lying far above among the snow fields, from which, in turn, it drew its waters. Along the brook were low willows for a little distance, and then the altitude proved too much for them, and only grass grew. On the left-hand side, for several thousand feet above them, rose bare rocks streaked with vertical lines of red and yellow, while off to the south was the pass, showing as a deep sag two or three thousand feet below the general crest of the mountains, and up to this sag the amphitheater which they were entering rose with a gradual ascent. On the south and west side of the pass the mountains rose to a great height, terminating in a confused mass of rocks, from which three slender pinnacles towered toward the sky. The open meadow which they were now crossing was carpeted with soft, green grass, and with an astonishing profusion of flowers, red, yellow, blue, purple; columbines, harebells, asters, and a multitude of other flowers grew here, or higher up, close to and even among the snow banks. It was a wild-flower garden such as perhaps few people except those who have traveled in the high mountains have ever seen.

As they climbed higher and approached the pass, the ascent became steeper, and presently a cool breeze swept down the mountain side, showing that they were nearing the pass. A few hundred feet more of climbing and they reached the summit, where they halted to rest and look down on the lower land before and behind them. In front, to the south and east, they could see a great part of Middle Park and of the rugged and

broken mountains which surrounded it. Almost at their feet a little lake nestled in the mountains. A few hundred feet below, the north fork of Grand River takes its rise and flows down through the narrow, wooded gorge, whose length they saw as far as the plains of Middle Park. High above, to the right, in a saddle, was a huge snowdrift, whose melting waters flowed from one extremity into the stream they had been ascending, and so on into the North Platte, and into the Missouri River; while from the other end another stream leaped out to join Grand River, which after a long course joins the Green to form that mighty stream of the West, the Colorado River, and so to reach the Pacific.

Looking backward the whole course of the Michigan lay before them, and away beyond it the gray sagebrush flats of North Park, with here and there a little lake gleaming in the sun like a bit of burnished silver.

"Great show, isn't it, Henry?" said Jack.

"Yes," said the English boy. "It is a marvelous view."

They had no time for further talk, for Hugh had started his horse down the pass on the other side, and following an old game trail he rode by the little lake until he reached the first few spruces that grew on that side of the range. Here camp was made, and as there were still a few hours of daylight, Jack proposed to Henry that they should climb up on the high mountains to the north and east of camp.

"I don't know how long Hugh will want to stay," he said to Henry, "but we better make the most of our time. If we can get up pretty high we may see a sheep or possibly a bull elk, and I guess you'd like a shot at either one, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed, I would," said Henry.

The boys started out, breasting the steep, rocky slope with courage. After climbing to a point a few hundred feet above the level of the pass, all vegetation

disappeared except a gray lichen which clung to the rocks which were scattered everywhere over the ground. The mountainside was very steep. The loose rocks did not always give a firm foothold, and at that altitude the air was so rare that the boys were frequently obliged to stop and take breath. A cold wind had sprung up, but by the time they had reached the summit they were wet with perspiration. Jack quickly led the way to the lee of a huge mass of rock, and here, sheltered from the wind, the boys reclined and basked in the warm sunshine. Nearby was the edge of a tall precipice which almost overhung the camp, and going to the edge the two looked over, trying to guess how far they were above the camp. They could see a man in the camp, but could not recognize him, and the horses scattered in a little meadow seemed very small.

"Well," said Jack, "this isn't hunting. Come on;" and turning to one side, he struck off along the ridge of the mountain, followed by Henry. This ridge was smooth, rounded, and undulating, though constantly ascending. To the left was a deep, wide valley, in which grew many low willows, where Jack felt sure must be ptarmigan, while to the right were far-stretching mountains, most of them pine-covered and dark green, but one or two bristling with dead timber, whose white and weather-worn trunks gleamed and shone when touched by the sun. Jack saw a lot of things that he would have been glad to point out to Henry, but if they were to hunt, they must be about it. For some distance nothing was seen except a single little bird, which walked about the rocks, and then, as it was approached, rose on wing and flew a little further on, only to rise again. Now and then, from the rocks which lay on either side of the ridge, the plaintive cry of the little chief hare was heard. At one place Jack saw some freshly shed white feathers, which showed that some ptarmigan had passed by not long before, but

he merely pointed to them with his hand as he passed them.

Presently, however, as the boys were crossing a little saddle, Jack noticed in some loose sand the tracks of two mountain sheep. He followed them carefully, going very slowly as he came to each ridge, but for some time saw nothing of the animals. Then, presently, on raising his head slightly over a ridge, he saw, almost on the crest of the next ridge, a ewe walking along, and a moment later a good ram came in sight following her. As he saw them he crouched down lower and lower, motioning with his hand to his companion to imitate his actions. The sheep stopped on the crest of the ridge, and looked about them and then passed on, unfrightened. As they disappeared, Jack slowly arose, first to his knees and then to his feet, and whispered to Henry, "Come on, now, here's a chance for a shot." They ran as hard as they could across the little hollow and up the slope where the sheep had just passed. As they approached the ridge, Jack slackened his pace a little, and falling back beside Henry, said, "You'll probably get a shot from this ridge. Go slowly now; get control of your wind, if you can; remember to shoot low down and just behind the foreshoulder. Low down, I tell you, and don't forget how to look through your sights. Now go carefully. I'll go ahead and take the look, and you load your gun and follow. Do just what you see me do." Jack approached the crest with extreme caution, for he was anxious that Henry should get a shot. It was well that he did so, for the sheep had paused in the little hollow beyond and were only now climbing the next hill, and scarcely seventy yards away. Jack threw himself flat on the ground and motioned Henry up beside him, and then whispered, "Take the ram, the one with the big horns. You have plenty of time; don't make any sudden motions, and wait a moment. They may stop." Lying full length on the ground,

resting his elbows on it, Henry leveled his rifle, and a moment later the ram, which was behind, turned aside to nibble some bit of vegetation and gave a broadside shot. "Now," said Jack. "Remember, low down, and let him have it." A moment later the gun cracked, the ram plunged forward, and both sheep ran quickly over the ridge.

"By Jove, I believe you got him. I know he was hit, and I think hit right," and they raced along.

"Oh," said Henry, as they pantingly staggered up the slope, "I'm afraid I didn't hit him. My gun kept moving around so; but when I pulled the trigger, I thought it was moving toward the right spot, and I knew I never could hold it still."

As they topped the ridge, Jack saw lying among the rocks below them something brown and curved, which he was sure was one of the ram's horns.

"Hurrah!" he yelled, and they plunged down among the broken stones, leaping from one to another like a pair of young goats. Jack was much more active among the rocks than Henry, and reached the ram first. It was quite dead, for the bullet had gone just to the right spot, and through the great beast's heart.

When Henry came up, Jack shook his hands in cordial congratulation, and then, drawing his butcher knife, prepared to bleed the ram.

"My," he said, "but we've got a job now. You and I can never carry this animal into camp. We'll have to take what we can, and come up here to-morrow with help. Possibly we can get a pack horse up here, though I doubt it. I know we can't get one up the way we came, but there may be some other road. Well, come on," he continued, "we've got no time to fool; it will be dark in a couple of hours, and we must hurry." As they were at work removing the animal's entrails, Jack said, "Now, what shall we try to carry back?"

"Oh, Jack," said Henry, "whatever we leave here, let us take the head with us. I would not lose that

for anything. Just think, it's the first sheep I ever saw, the first I ever shot at, and the first I ever killed. I do want to take that in and show it to my governor. My, won't he be delighted!"

"Well," said Jack, "if we carry the head we can't carry anything else. That head as it is, without any of the neck, will weigh not less than forty or fifty pounds, and we've got quite a way to go. Moreover, it's such an unhandy thing that we can't both of us carry it. We've got to spell each other."

"Let's try to take it, anyhow, Jack," said Henry.

"All right," said Jack, "we'll try," and cutting the skin of the neck low down to breast and shoulders, the boys quickly skinned away the hide from the flesh, cutting the head off at the first joint.

"Now," said Jack, "we must start back."

He took a red silk handkerchief out of his pocket, and putting it on the top of a high rock close to the sheep, placed a stone on the corner in such a way that when the breeze blew the handkerchief would flutter almost over the sheep's carcass. "That may keep away the eagles and the magpies," he said. Then he gave both rifles to Henry, handed him the sheep's liver to carry in his other hand, and, hoisting the sheep's head on his back, set out on the return to camp. Half a dozen times on the return journey the two boys changed loads, but at last they reached the end of the ridge and could look down on the camp. By a little search they found an easier place to go down than that by which they had ascended, and Jack thought that still further to the right he saw a still easier way, one up which a pack horse could perhaps be led.

The sun had already hidden itself behind the western mountains when the two tired boys reached camp. Jack, who had the ram's head on his shoulders, dropped it to the ground with a groan of relief, and said, "Well, Henry, I don't know who else I would have done this for."

The story of their success was soon told, and Mr. Clifford was delighted with the trophy, while Hugh praised Henry's shot and prophesied that he would become a good hunter. Henry told the story of his shot, of the hopes and fears connected with it, and of his final despair as the ram rushed off, and then of the rebound of his spirits at Jack's declaration that he believed the ram had been hit. Altogether it was a very pleasant evening.

After the talk had a little quieted down, and supper was being cooked for the boys, Jack asked Hugh, "Where does this meat come from, Hugh?"

"Why," said Hugh, "Mr. Clifford and I went out and took a little walk, and he killed a good fat bull elk. We're going out to get the meat in the morning."

"Well," said Jack, "this seems to be a great day for the Clifford family," a remark which both Mr. Clifford and his son seemed to find very amusing, for they shouted with laughter at it.

The next morning Hugh and Mr. Clifford, with one of the pack horses, went off to bring in the bull, while Jack, Henry, and Jones, with another animal, climbed the ridge to get the ram.

On their way back the two boys were fortunate enough to come upon a little brood of ptarmigan, the young now almost full grown and the mother beginning to be touched with white on various parts of her body. The little birds were quite tame, and permitted a near approach, but at length one after another they flew away, pitching down the mountainside with the high-pitched cackle that this bird always utters.

That afternoon the boys were too tired to go out and hunt, and Mr. Clifford seemed satisfied with his success of the day before. The next day, however, Jack and Henry climbed the mountains on the other side of the pass. They soon found themselves among peaks much higher and more rugged and difficult than they had yet seen. They found some sheep and were endeavoring

to stalk them when, without any warning, a blanket of white fog settled down over the mountain top, hiding the sheep and everything else, except things very close at hand. They tried to get a little closer to the sheep, but the fog was so dense and so confusing that Jack put a veto on their moving, and they sat there waiting for the fog to lift. Curious sounds were constantly coming to them from the mountainside. Rattling of rocks, calls of birds and of small mammals, and other sounds which they could not recognize. Once the fog lifted for a little, and Jack thought he saw standing at a distance three rams. He stared to see whether they actually were rams or only small rifts in the fog, and then before he could determine, the mist shut down again and blotted them out. As the boys sat there, there was a whirl of wings in the air, and presently all about them alighted curious little birds with gray crowns, brown bodies, and rosy breasts, active, noisy, and constantly searching for food among the rocks, while they constantly uttered a shrill, musical whistle.

After a while Henry seemed to tire of this inaction, and said to Jack, "What are we going to do, Jack? Can't we go on?"

"Why, yes," said Jack, "we can go on, but where do you want to go?"

"Why," said Henry, "let's keep on hunting, or if we can't hunt, let's go to camp."

"Well," said Jack, "where do you want to hunt, and what are you going to hunt when you can't see much more than arm's length ahead of you? Anything you might come near would be certain to see you before you saw it, and one jump would take it out of sight. A man's got to have the use of his eyes if he's going to hunt, and in this fog we haven't the use of ours. Moreover, we can't go back to camp, because we don't know where camp is, at least I don't. I think

it's in one direction, but I'm not sure. Where do you think it is?" he said.

"It's over there," said Henry, pointing.

"Well," said Jack, "I think it's over there," and he pointed almost exactly in the opposite direction. But he went on, "Even if we knew just where it is, I don't want to stir around much on the side of this mountain while the fog is as thick as it is. It would be easy enough for a fellow to tumble over the edge of a cliff and break some of his bones, and if he did that the other people in his party wouldn't have a very good time, would they?"

"No," said Henry, "I don't think they would; but is there any danger?"

"I don't know that there's any real danger," said Jack, "but I don't think it's worth while to run any risks unless there's something to be gained by doing it."

"No," said Henry, "I suppose not, but I hate to sit here doing nothing."

"So do I," agreed Jack; "I hate it just as badly as you do, I guess; but I think it's better to do that than to do something that might make a whole lot of trouble for all of us. Hugh has been preaching patience to me for the last five years, and though I haven't learned very fast, I've got it partly learned, I think; and I know it's best for us to sit here until this fog lifts, or until we get some idea of where we'd better go."

They sat there for quite a long time, and then gradually the fog grew brighter, and presently slowly rolled away from them and up the cliffs toward the peak, and the sun shone over the mountainside. Jack crawled out from the shelter of the rock and scanned the peaks above him for sheep, but could see nothing, and as it was well on toward the middle of the afternoon, he told Henry that they had better go to camp.

Hugh and Mr. Clifford had also been out climbing

for sheep, and had also been overtaken by the fog, but as they had not been so high up as the boys, it did not stop them so long. No game had been killed. Jones had been busy all day long drying the flesh of the elk, which Hugh had shown him how to cut into thin flakes and hang out in the sun and wind.

That afternoon Hugh took Jack apart and told him that they would do well to return down the Michigan and continue their journey toward Middle Park, and Jack assented.

"I like these English folks," said Hugh, "and if they were going our way, we'd be well pleased to have them travel with us, but we certainly are not going their way, and can't follow them. If they feel like turning 'round and coming back with us, I'll say 'come.'"

Later in the afternoon, as they were sitting around the campfire, Hugh said, "Well, Mr. Clifford, son and I calculated to start back to-morrow. We want to go on down into Middle Park, and maybe get a little more fur, and if, as I understand, you're going down this creek here and going to Middle Park that way, why, we've got to separate."

For a moment after Hugh had spoken there was silence, and then Mr. Clifford spoke rather slowly and hesitatingly, and said, "Mr. Johnson, we have greatly enjoyed the few days that we have been with you and your young friend, and in that short time both my son and myself have seen more and learned more about this western country than we ever could have done in any other way. We would take it as a great favor if you would permit us to turn around and travel back with you. We value your company very highly, and if we might go with you, it would be a great favor to us, and one for which I should be willing to pay well. Of course, I understand that if we were with you, you would not be so free as if you were alone; that we would take up some of your time; that we might inter-

fere with your trapping arrangements, and taking all that into consideration, I should be glad to pay any reasonable sum per day for the privilege of camping with you."

For a moment or two Hugh said nothing, and then he spoke and said, "Mr. Clifford, son here and I like you all very much, and it's a pleasure to us to have you around. If you feel like turning back with us, we'll be glad to have you. We are not out here traveling around in the mountains altogether as a matter of business. It's partly for pleasure, although, of course, we have been trapping and we expect to sell the fur that we may get. If you feel like turning around and coming back with us, we'd be glad to have you do so. I don't reckon there need be any question of paying for anybody's time. We like to have you about, and as long as we keep on feeling that way, you better come. If we should disagree about anything, why, then we could stop and separate any time."

"We are very much obliged to you," said Mr. Clifford. "You have done us a great favor. If at any time you should feel that you and your young friend prefer to be alone, tell me and we will leave you at once."

Bright and early the next morning the little train was packed, and by afternoon it had reached the old camp where the bear trap stood. The train was stopped, and all four men rode up to look at the trap. Bears had been there in numbers, and of the old carcass that had been left in the pen, nothing was left except a few gnawed bones.

"If we had time to fool with them," said Hugh, "we could get another bear or two here, but I don't reckon it's worth while. Let's go on and get down the creek as far as we can to-night."

They hurried on, crossed the broad beaver meadow of the Michigan before dark, and camped on the other side.

CHAPTER XX

DANGER FROM THE UTES

From the Michigan they went on south, following the road which led to the Owl Creek Mines. The way over the rolling plateau of North Park passed at a considerable distance from the mountains, and no large game except antelope was seen. There were many coyotes, and Jack took pleasure in telling Henry some of the curious facts about these cunning animals.

At the crossing of Owl Creek they met a prospector who was driving a couple of little jacks loaded with provisions and tools, and with him Hugh gossiped about the washings along the stream. The prospector said that some of the placer diggings here paid good wages, but that as yet no one had struck anything that was rich.

"I am about sick of this country," said the prospector. "The mines don't pay, and sometime I reckon we're going to have trouble with these Indians. They come around and look at us, and if we say anything to them, they talk back mighty sassy. I expect they don't much like to have white folks coming into the country and driving off the game."

"No," said Hugh, "I reckon maybe they don't, but then, the Utes have always been mighty friendly, except when they broke out and killed their agent, and then had that fight with Thornburgh."

After the prospector had passed on, Mr. Clifford asked Hugh whether he supposed that there was any danger from the Indians.

"No," said Hugh, "I don't think there is. I used to know some of these people, and always found them

mighty good people if they were treated right, but on the other hand, they have always been a race of mountain hunters, and I can understand that it might make them pretty mad to see the whites coming in here and killing and driving off what they have always regarded as their food."

The road led them over a timbered spur, and then after crossing another creek, headed almost directly toward Arapaho Peak. The weather was cold and blustering, with occasional snow flurries, some of them so severe that it was impossible to see any distance.

Just after one of these had ceased, Hugh, who had reached the top of a ridge, stopped his horse and waved those behind up to his side. Looking over the ridge, Jack saw, a long way off, a black object, which he at once recognized as a buffalo, and when Hugh told Mr. Clifford and Henry what the animal was, they were wild to kill it, for neither had ever before seen a wild buffalo. Hugh and Jack looked the country over, and after a little study it appeared that by going back and taking a ravine it would be possible to get close to the buffalo, and it was decided that Jack should take the Cliffords and go back and around, and should try to take them up near enough to the bull to kill it. The stalk was successfully made, and at last a point was reached where a shot could be had at the animal at about a hundred yards distant, but just as the Cliffords were about to shoot, the wind changed, and their scent must have reached the bull, for with astonishing activity he wheeled about and plunged into a fringe of quaking aspens near which he stood. Both the Cliffords shot after him, but without effect, and Jack, who followed the track for some little distance, could see no evidence that it had been hit.

The three then returned to the pack train, which had started on as soon as the buffalo had been alarmed. The two Cliffords were very much depressed by their

lack of success, but Mr. Clifford was a little cheered by a good shot made at an antelope before the pack train was joined. A band of twenty antelope ran up and stood on the bluff about three hundred yards off, and Jack suggested that Mr. Clifford should fire at one of the bucks which stood a little apart. The distance was great, and Mr. Clifford asked Jack how he should hold.

"If I were you," said Jack, "I would not raise my sights, but would aim at the tips of the antelope's horns and then move my sight over his shoulders and fire."

After long and careful aiming, the rifle sounded, and the ball seemed to strike the bluff just beyond the buck.

"That was a close call for that fellow, Mr. Clifford," said Jack, "and I thought I heard the ball strike, but it must have been just striking the earth." The band of antelope rushed up the hillside and presently disappeared, but before that the buck that had been shot at turned about and dashed back again almost to the place where he had been standing when the shot was fired, and fell. The ball had pierced both shoulders.

They camped that night on Buffalo Creek, and not far from them was an Indian camp of the year before, where many bones and great piles of hair showed that much meat had been brought in and many hides tanned.

The next day they crossed through the Arapaho Pass and camped near Whiteley's Peak on Muddy Creek in Middle Park.

After camp had been made, Hugh said to Jack, "Now, son, get out your fishing rod if you like, and try for the trout in this little stream."

Jack did so, and to his great satisfaction took fifteen trout, all of them small ones, but all greatly enjoyed by people who had been for months living on flesh.

The next day they started for the Hermitage Ranch,

the home of Old Jack Rand, long a resident of these mountains. The march had but just begun when Hugh saw ahead of him a rider coming at good speed. As the man approached, he began to make signs to Hugh, who halted, and when the rider came up, he was seen to have been riding hard and far. "You better turn around, partners," he said. "There is trouble down below. The Utes have gone to war again, and swear they're going to clean out the settlements. We have sent a courier to ask for help from Denver, and I'm riding up to Laramie to try to get some troops to come in from there. I reckon we're going to have another Meeker massacre, but I hope not another Thornburgh killing. They say the Utes are mad, and are going to clean out all the settlers. You'd better turn 'round, and get out of this, unless you are looking for trouble."

"Well," said Hugh, "we're not looking for trouble, and I don't want any Indian fighting, without it's thrust upon me. What do you know yourself about these people? Have you seen any of the Indians?"

"No," said the man, "I haven't. I heard that a lot of gamblers went up to the Ute reservation and took two or three race horses with them. First they ran their slow horses against the Utes', and the Utes beat them all; but finally they brought out a part thoroughbred that was swift, and that they thought would beat the Utes' ponies, but they got fooled on that. The Utes brought out a new pony that got away with their fast horse, and then the gamblers would not pay what they bet, and started in to try to take away the horses that the Utes had won. That made the Utes mad, and they threatened to kill the gamblers. They say some shots were fired, and some say some white men were killed, and some say some Utes were killed. Anyhow, there's going to be trouble, and you ought to know it before you go on."

"Well," said Hugh, "we're mightily obliged to you for giving us this warning. I'll talk to my party here, and we'll decide what to do."

"Well, so long," said the rider; and he spurred up his horse and disappeared on the road toward Laramie.

Hugh spoke to the members of the party, all of whom had gathered around the stranger, and said, "This is bad news, and I reckon we better turn around and make tracks for the railroad. Of course, if we had any quarrel with the Utes and wanted to fight them, why, we could keep on, but I reckon there's nobody here wants to get into trouble. Certainly I don't, and I don't want Jack to, and you men who are out traveling for pleasure don't want to, either. As for you, Jones, the Indians, if they do make any trouble, will be between here and the place you want to go to, and you don't want to risk your animals and your life down there if there's going to be any fight."

"No," said Jones, "I certainly do not."

"Well, but, Mr. Johnson, all our things are in Denver, and we must get back there," said Mr. Clifford.

"You can do that by way of the railroad," answered Hugh, "if you want to. That's better than riding down through the parks and running into a fight, as you might do if you kept on."

"Yes," said Mr. Clifford, "I think it is. I certainly don't want to get into trouble of any sort."

"Well," said Hugh, "whatever you others decide, Jack and I will go back. I would not take the responsibility of getting him into any Indian fighting. He and I can take care of ourselves well enough if we have to, but we are not looking for trouble."

Hugh turned about and rode back the way that they had come, and the others followed him without further discussion. The day's march was a long one, and they camped on Buffalo Creek in North Park.

That evening, after supper, Hugh said: "Now, I

want you all to understand how I feel about this report that we've had to-day. Likely enough the message that that rider gave us was just a simple scare story that hasn't any foundation in fact; but then again, it may be true. My position is just this: I've brought son here out for a summer's trip, and it's understood that I shall use my best judgment to make him have a good time, and to make him learn things, but it is also understood that I shall not let him get into any danger if I can help it. I propose to have any mistakes that I may make, made on the safe side; so I would rather run away from a rumor than go ahead and investigate that rumor and then find that it was true and that we had met some danger.

"Jack knows how to take care of himself a good deal better than most young men. He has been in danger a good many times, but I do not want to have him get into danger if he can avoid it. Now, I propose to get started before day to-morrow morning, and make a long, hard ride. If the Indians break out, we are likely to see them any time while we're here in North Park, but after we have passed Pinkham's, I don't think there is any danger. They won't go as far north as that."

It was long before light next morning when breakfast was cooked, and before the first dawn, the train was in motion. While they were packing, Hugh spoke to Jack and said, "Son, there's no use to talk much about it, but you and I are the only men in this outfit that know much of anything about the prairie, and we must do the best we can to keep the others out of trouble. I don't much expect that we will have any trouble, but we must both be on the lookout for it all the time. Now, I want you to ride behind, and to keep the packs up close, and I want you also to watch the back trail closely, and if you see anybody following us, or in fact coming from any direction behind, let me

know as soon as you can. It may be that there are little camps of Utes scattered out all through the mountains. You and I haven't seen any signs of them, but that doesn't mean that they are not there. If this trouble is serious and came up suddenly, the Indians will send out runners to all these little camps, the men will get back as fast as they can to where the trouble is, and the women and children will go through the mountains keeping themselves hidden. So you see it's possible that at any time a little bunch of Indians may jump out of the mountains close to us, and if there are wild young men among them, they may come down and try to take what we've got. I don't reckon they care much for our scalps, but they'd like our horses and guns, and this fur, too, if they knew we had it.

"Now, as I say, you and I have got to be the eyes of this outfit, and if by any chance it should come to fighting, we've got to do the fighting, too. Those Englishmen and that ranchman that they've hired won't be of any use at all."

When they set out, Hugh traveled more rapidly than he had at any time on the trip, and Jack, who, as directed, brought up the rear, kept the last horses well up with the bunch. By noon they had covered a good distance and had crossed the Michigan. Two or three hours later, Jack began to think that if they kept on they would certainly reach Pinkham's that night.

All during the day he had been particularly alert, watching the back trail and the prairie on either side. He had just been looking back and was turning his eyes to the front again, when off to the west he saw some black dots appear from behind a hill two or three miles away. A moment later he could see that there were fifteen or twenty of these dots, which he at once made out to be riders coming directly toward them. Jack gave a whoop, and waved his hand to the left as Hugh looked back, and a moment later Hugh called to

the others to keep the horses up close, and started ahead on a good lope. Jack kept watching the group of pursuers, and it was not long before he could see that they were Indians. It was not, perhaps, so much any one thing about them, for they were much too distant for him to see how they were clad, or how they were armed, but there was something in the way they rode, in the swing of their bodies, which made him sure that they were Indians; of course, Utes, and since they were pursuing them, presumably hostile. He looked ahead to see what Hugh was doing, and where he was going, and presently saw him direct his course toward an isolated group of cottonwood trees which stood near the stream in a wide meadow.

The Indians were still a couple of miles behind them, and there was plenty of time for the train to take refuge among the trees before the enemy—if enemies they were—could come within rifle shot.

A little later, Hugh rode in among the trees and almost through them to the other side, and then suddenly pulling up his horse, he sprang to the ground and began to catch up the pack animals, and to tie them to trees in the center of the little grove, where they would in some degree be protected from bullets if any shooting took place. The Englishmen and Jones were quick to assist him as soon as they saw what he was trying to do, and by the time Jack had come up, all the horses had been secured.

Hugh called out to Jack, "Now, son, I want you all to scatter out and to see that none of these Indians get close to this timber. I don't know yet what they mean, but if they mean fight, we can stand them off here. They probably know that troops have been sent for, and they won't stay here long. They will hurry back to their main outfit. We're about as safe here as we would be in a house, but, of course, we've all got to keep our eyes open. You look after these other men,

and see that each one keeps a good lookout on his side, and that each one keeps far enough back so that he won't get shot if there is any shooting. Remember, these Utes are good shots. On the other hand, their guns won't carry very far, and they're likely to be poor off for ammunition. Watch out now."

All this time the Indians had been drawing closer, and where now within about five hundred yards of the trees, but it seemed to Jack they were going a little slower all the time. He saw them from the other side of the grove, where he was posting the Cliffords and Jones. As they came up, half a dozen men rode ahead from either flank and passed part way around the group of cottonwood trees, stopping at intervals, until finally the grove was surrounded by a thin line of men, who had every part of it under observation. No one could leave the grove without being seen.

"Well," said Jack to himself, "what sort of fools do these people think we are? They don't imagine that we are going to leave a good safe place like this and start off over the prairie, do they?"

A moment later he saw Hugh step out of the timber on the open meadow, in plain sight, and make signs to the Indians, and then saw the group that was still advancing from that side stop. By this time Jack had posted his men and advised them what to do, and he quickly slipped back to the edge of the timber near where Hugh stood. When Hugh made his signs, the first of which Jack recognized as the sign for "friends" and then the sign to "stop" or "keep off," the Indians stopped, consulted together, and presently one of them rode out alone, and coming a hundred yards nearer the timber, began to make signs. A moment later Hugh called to Jack and said, "Son, this man says he wants to talk, and I think I'll go out and meet him. It isn't likely that he'll try to play any trick on me. I shall take my gun with me, and let him take

his, but you must keep a sharp lookout. If anything should happen to me, you must try to slip away to-night and get beyond Pinkham's, then you'll be safe. Of course nothing will happen to me; but a person might be struck by lightning."

Hugh mounted his horse and rode out toward the Indian, and the two met midway between the group of Indians and the trees. As Hugh approached the Ute, Jack, who was watching carefully, seemed to see a change in the attitude of the two men, and saw that they rode up close to one another and shook hands, Hugh giving his left hand to the Indian, who shook it with his right, while Hugh held his rifle in his right hand. After a few minutes' talk, the Indian turned and galloped back to his people, while Hugh sat and watched him for a moment, and then wheeling, rode swiftly back toward the trees. He had almost reached them, when suddenly a shot rang out in the trees not far behind Jack, and he saw Hugh throw himself forward on his saddle, while the group of Indians, dropping down out of sight behind their horses, scattered and rode away. An instant later Hugh rode by him into the shelter of the trees, and pulling up his horse, sprang to the ground with the question, "Who fired that shot?"

"I don't know," replied Jack.

"Well," said Hugh, "you stop here and watch, and if those Indians come up on this side, call out to me."

He then threw down his reins and disappeared among the tree trunks. The first person he saw was Henry, looking very much disturbed, and on the ground not far before him, Hugh noticed a green cottonwood twig, freshly broken from a branch, to which the unfaded leaves still clung.

The Indians that had been distributed about the clump of trees had disappeared, and it was evident that at the shot they had quickly gotten under cover.

"Did you fire that shot, my boy?" asked Hugh, though he hardly needed the answer.

"Yes," said Henry, "my gun went off by accident. I saw the Indians all about us, and loaded my gun, and then began to cock it, so as to be ready if anything happened, when the hammer slipped from my thumb, and the gun went off."

"Well," said Hugh, "that's a pity. Let me look at your gun."

Henry handed it over to him, and Hugh opened the breech and took from it the newly fired cartridge shell in which some of the smoke still hung. He put the shell in his pocket, and then asked, "Which way was your gun pointed?"

"Why," said Henry, "it was pointed nearly straight up in the air, I think. Anyhow, I know that the branch of a tree fell down in front of me just after the gun was discharged."

"Well," said Hugh, "I don't think there's going to be any fighting, and if I were you I would not load my gun again until either Jack or I tell you to. Just stand where you are, and keep a good lookout. Where is your father?"

"He is over there to the left somewhere. Jack placed us, and told us to stay where we were, and to keep watch until he came to us again."

"All right," answered Hugh, "just wait here, and I'll go over and speak to your father; and then I've got to speak to these Indians again."

Mr. Clifford was found in the place where Jack had put him. He seemed glad to see Hugh, and very anxious to know what the shot had meant. Hugh reassured him, telling him of the accident, but without commenting on it. Then Hugh returned to Jack and told him what had happened.

"I don't know whether we'll be able to talk to those Indians again, son," he said. "That shot will make

them all mighty suspicious. I was a little uneasy when they first got around us, but as soon as I saw who those men were that I talked to I knew it was all right. I know some of them right well, and the one who met me is Man Above. He used to be a friend of mine. Man Above said that the Indians don't want to fight the white people, but they don't want them coming in here to kill their game, and they are going to tell everybody to get out; and then if they won't get out, the Indians will fight them. He told me that he had just heard about the trouble down below, and doesn't know what it's about, but that they are going back soon to find out.

"I told him that we were just on our way home, and didn't expect to hunt here any more, but that if they wanted to fight us, we were ready for them, and they could start in any time. I said that the Utes knew me, and that I had with me three men that had good guns and could shoot as well as I, and that if we had any fighting, it would be real fighting and not play. I said it would make me feel bad to fight the Utes, because I had always liked them and felt friendly toward them; that it would be bad for them to fight the white people, because there were too many whites for them to fight. If they killed a few, more would come, and at last they would whip the Utes. He said that he knew me, and I knew him, and he did not want to fight me; that our guns were good, and that many of his young men had only bows. He said that he was glad we were going away, and that now, after what I had told him, they would go away in the opposite direction, so that there would be no danger of trouble. But you see that shot has spoiled everything. Now I've got to see if I can get them to talk again. You see how a little thing like that boy's carelessness might start a trouble that would cost half a dozen men their lives."

"Yes," said Jack, "it was pretty stupid. I sup-

pose it might have happened to me, perhaps, just as well as to Henry, but I am mighty glad it wasn't me."

"No," said Hugh, "I should hate to believe that you could do such a fool thing as that."

Hugh mounted his horse and again rode out into the open, stopping a couple of hundred yards from the trees, and here he made the peace sign again.

One of the distant Indians—which one Jack could not see because of the distance, rode out toward Hugh. Then Hugh dismounted, and, after holding his gun above his head for a moment, placed it on the ground, and then remounted and rode toward the Indian. A little later the Indian dismounted and put his gun on the ground, and presently he and Hugh met. Hugh explained to Man Above—for it was he—what the shot had meant, and asked him, if he felt like it, to ride into the timber and see for himslf what had happened. If he did not feel like it, Hugh asked him if he would gather up his men and go away as he had before said he intended to do. "I think," said Hugh, "if you will ask your men, you will find that no one of them was shot at. The boy just let his gun go off in the air, but it happened at a bad time."

"I will get my men together," said Man Above; "and if no one of them says that he was shot at, we will go away as I promised. I believe that your words are true, and that the shot was fired by accident. Now I will go and send someone to call up the young men who are about these trees."

"That is good," said Hugh. "I should be sorry to fight you, my friend. It would do good to neither of us, and it might lead to much fighting."

"You speak well," said Man Above; and after shaking hands the two parted and rode in opposite directions, each one picking up his gun when he came to it.

A little later two Indians were seen to ride in op-

posite directions around the clump of trees, but a long way from it, and not long after the surrounding Indians were seen riding toward the group of their fellows, assembled on the prairie south of the cottonwoods. Hugh watched them with the glasses, and at last announced to Jack that they had all come together; and a little later the whole band of Indians turned their faces southward, and trotted off in the direction from which they had come.

As they started, Hugh shook his head and said, "Good Lord, what a terrible thing it is to be mixed up with pilgrims. That lad out there has no more idea of the danger he brought on us all than a chicken just out of the shell, and I reckon his father hasn't, either. If I hadn't happened to know some of that bunch of Indians, we never would have gotten off as easy as we did."

"I guess not," replied Jack; "and I can tell you I'm mighty glad to see those Indians go. I don't know whether it's just plain prudence, or whether I've got some feeling of responsibility about these English people, but I'm sure I don't want to fight these Utes a bit. Two or three years ago I would have felt differently. Do you remember, Hugh, how crazy I was to go off on a war party with Joe and Bull Calf and some of that outfit, one summer up with the Piegans?"

"Yes," answered Hugh, "I remember it. You thought I treated you pretty badly, I guess, that time."

"Yes," said Jack, "I did. But I've been mighty glad a good many times since. Now we can watch these Utes and see them a long way off. If they pass over that farthest hill, we can start from here before dark, and they can't catch us before we get out of the Park."

"That's right," said Hugh. "Now let's unload and give these horses a chance to feed and rest, and

then about sundown we'll start, and ride all night if we have to."

The horses were speedily stripped and picketed out on the meadow where the grazing was good, and then Jack and Hugh returned to the edge of the grove, and sat there watching the retreating group of Indians, whose figures grew smaller and smaller as the distance increased.

They were doing just what they had agreed to do, and an hour and a half later the band were passing over the most distant crest, and Hugh, counting them through the field glasses, declared that the number was just what it had been when he talked to them.

Now the animals were brought in, loaded, and the train swiftly set in motion. They rode all night, and the next morning at daylight camped on the Laramie River, well out of reach of any trouble with the Utes. Two days later they were at Laramie, and there Hugh and Jack regretfully parted with their English friends, who returned to Denver by rail, shipping their horses also on the railroad.

Jack and Hugh turned their faces westward, and a little more than a week later were showing their catch of fur to Mr. Sturgis at the ranch.

"But, son," said Hugh, "we didn't half trap. We ought to have loaded at least two horses with beaver."

THE END

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